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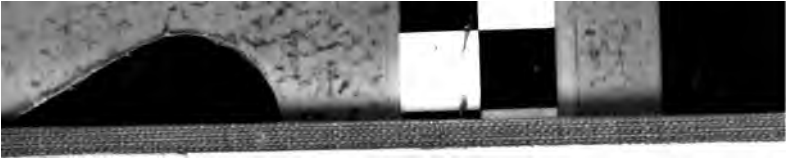
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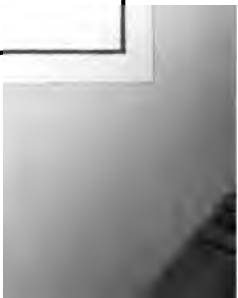


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A white streak—like the finger of conscience pointing at Santa.

The Vanishing Point

BY

CONINGSBY DAWSON

*Author of "The Kingdom Round the Corner,"
"The Garden Without Walls," etc.*

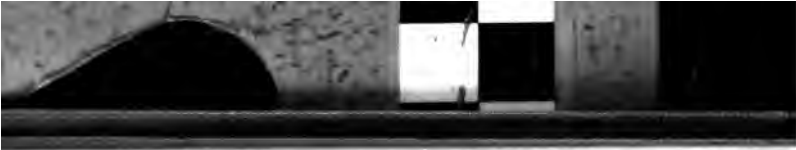
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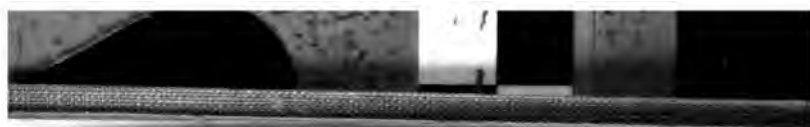
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CONTENTS

CHAPTER I	PAGE
THE DISAPPEARANCE OF A PATRIOT	13
CHAPTER II	
THE RETURN OF SANTA GORLOF	56
CHAPTER III	
HE PLUNGES INTO ROMANCE	96
CHAPTER IV	
HE BECOMES PART OF THE GAME	135
CHAPTER V	
THE GREEN EYES CAST A SPELL	175
CHAPTER VI	
THE ESCAPE	216
CHAPTER VII	
THE CAPTURE	266
CHAPTER VIII	
THE VANISHING POINT	314



THE ILLUSTRATIONS

A white steak—like the finger of conscience pointing at Santa	<i>Frontispiece</i>
	FACING PAGE
Tears of horror sprang into her China-blue eyes. "But I don't want to kill you."	129
As he stumbled towards them, Santa uttered a nerv- ous cry and turned	178
It was like a triumph at the opera	328



"When you gaze up a railroad track," said Varensky, "there's always a point in the infinite distance where, just before they vanish, the parallel rails seem to join. If a train were ever to reach that point it would mean death.

"Life's like that—a track along which we travel on the parallel rails of possibility and desire. The lure of the idealist is to overtake the illusion, where possibility and desire seem to merge, and the safety of the journey ends."





THE VANISHING POINT



THE VANISHING POINT

CHAPTER THE FIRST

THE DISAPPEARANCE OF A PATRIOT

I

“PRINCE ROGOVICH! Prince Rogovich!”

Staring up at the clammy wall of the liner, blanched by searchlights, against which the little tug bumped and jostled, Philip Hindwood could hear the Prince's name being shouted in staterooms, along decks and passageways.

It had been midnight when they had drifted like a gallivanting hotel, all portholes ablaze, into the starlit vagueness of Plymouth Harbor. The *Ryndam* did not dock there; she only halted long enough to put off the English passengers and to drop the English mail. There had been three passengers to land, of whom Hindwood had been the first; the rest were disembarking at Boulogne or Rotterdam. They had been met just outside the harbor by the tug, and the transshipping of the mail had immediately commenced. The last bag had been tossed over the side; the immigration officials had completed their inspec-

tion. Santa Gorlof, the second passenger for England, radiantly smiling above her sables, had come down the gangplank. It was for the third passenger that the liner delayed and the tug still waited.

“Prince Rogovich! Prince Rogovich!”

The cries were becoming more insistent and impatient. They broke on the stillness with the monotony of despair. To judge by the sound, every soul aboard the liner had taken up the search, from the firemen in the stoke-hole to the Marconi men on the top deck. Even the thud of the engines seemed ominous, like the pounding of a heart stifled with foreboding. Across the velvety expanse of water, as though they had a secret they were trying to communicate, shore lights winked and twinkled. They seemed to be signaling the information that, no matter how long the search was maintained, Prince Rogovich would not be found that night.

II

Except for this last disturbing incident, it had been a pleasant voyage—the most pleasant Philip Hindwood could remember. They had left New York in the brilliant clearness of blue September skies. The clear blueness had followed them. The slow-going, matronly *Ryndam* had steamed on an even keel through seas as tranquil and reflective as the proverbial mill-pond. Her company had been dull, consisting mainly of American drummers and

DISAPPEARANCE OF A PATRIOT 15

Dutch Colonials returning from Java. But he had no grounds for complaint; he had chosen her for her dullness. He had wanted to lay up a store of rest before plunging into the strenuous excitements which were the purpose of his journey.

He had gone aboard her in an unsociable frame of mind, determined to talk to nobody; the success of his errand depended on his silence. He believed that he was half a year ahead of the times. When his rivals had caught up to where he was at present, he would have made himself a world power and dictator.

But the dullness of the ship's company had exceeded expectations. Because of this he had broken his compact and allowed his privacy to be invaded by two vivid personalities. The first had been Prince Rogovich—the second, Santa Gorlof.

Prince Rogovich had evidently boarded the ship with precisely the same intentions as himself. All his meals had been served in his stateroom; it had not been until the evening of the third day that he had appeared on deck. He was a man of commanding height, lean of hip and contemptuous of eye, with the disquieting, haughty reticence of an inscrutable Pharaoh. There was something alluring and oriental about the man, at once sinister and charming. Behind his silky black beard he hid a face which was deathly white; its pallor was not of ill-health, but of passion. It was easy to believe all the rumors about him, both as regarded his diabolical cleverness and his sensual cruelty. His enemies were legion. Even



among his countrymen he could count few friends, although he was reckoned their greatest patriot. In Poland he was suspected as much as he was admired, and was accused of intriguing in order that he might set up a throne for himself. The object of his flying visit to America had been to consult financial magnates on the advisability of floating an international loan in the interests of Poland. There were men the world over and in Russia especially, who would have paid a king's ransom for advance information as to what answer the financiers had returned.

Though Hindwood would not have claimed as much, he and the Prince were two of a kind, equally magnificent in their dreams, equally relentless in their means of realization, and equally insatiable in their instinct for conquest. Their difference lay in the fact that the Polish aristocrat had already attained the goal toward which the self-made American was no more than striving.

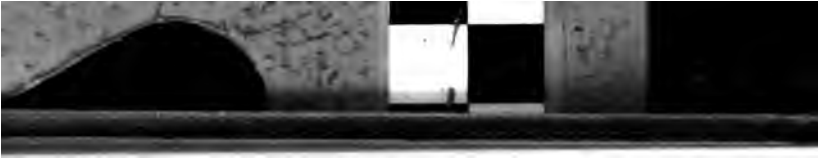
Their first meeting had happened in the early hours of the morning. Hindwood, being unable to sleep, had partly dressed and gone on deck. There, in the grayness of the dawn, he had espied a tall figure slowly pacing, accompanied by a snow-white Russian wolfhound. It was the remarkable grace of the man that had first held him, his faculty for stillness, his spectral paleness, his padded tread. But the moment he had approached him, the sense of his grace had been obscured by an atmosphere of menace. So sinister was his beauty that it had required

DISAPPEARANCE OF A PATRIOT 17

an effort to pass him twice. Secretly Hindwood had observed him. He was like his hound, treacherously languid, insolently fastidious, and bred to the point of emaciation. But his languor was the disguise of a hidden fierceness, which betrayed itself in his red, curved lips and the marble coldness of his stare. It was at the third time of passing, when he had all but gone by him, that he had heard his name spoken.

"Mr. Hindwood." Then, as he had turned, "You're the famous railroad expert. Am I right? It's fortunate we should have met. I missed you in America. So you, too, are among the sleepless!"

Then and there had started the first of those amazing conversations, which had held Hindwood fascinated for the remainder of the voyage. It had made no difference that in his heart he had almost hated the man—hated his ruthlessness, his subtlety, his polished immorality; the moment he commenced to talk, he surrendered to his spell. Their encounters had taken place for the most part between midnight and sunrise. To be his companion was like eavesdropping on the intimate counsels of all the cabinets of Europe or like reading your daily paper a year before it was published for the rest of mankind. On matters which did not concern him the Prince could be brilliantly confessional; indiscretion was the bait with which he lured his victims to reveal themselves. The secrets which were his own he kept. Never once did he drop a hint that would indicate the success or failure of his recent mission. The single time that Santa Gorlof had asked him point-blank, his dark



eyes had become focusless as opals, and his white face, under its silky covering of beard, unnoticing and sphinx-like. It was then that Hindwood had recognized the resemblance to Pharaoh in his tyrannic immobility and silence.

And Santa Gorlof! There was a woman—mysterious, exotic, well-nigh mythical! Compared with her the Prince was an open book. From the start she had made no attempt to explain herself, had referred neither to her past nor her future, had offered no credentials. She had imposed herself on Hindwood like a goddess who expected to be worshiped. She had swept him off his feet, beaten aside his caution, and reached his heart before he was aware.

But was it his heart? How often, in the past few days, he had asked himself that question! He didn't want to believe that it was his heart. He was a man who rode alone; his aloneness was the reason for his swiftness. He had been tricked once by a woman. That was when he was a boy; now he was a man nearing forty. She had cheated him so cruelly that, though she had been dead many years, the bitterness still rankled. Behind the beauty of all women his skepticism detected the shallow loveliness of the one false woman who had stolen his idealism, that she might trample on it.

He did not love Santa. He had assured himself a thousand times that he did not love her. She was too dangerous, too incalculable. He had spent long hours of wakeful nights in completing the inventory of her bad points. And yet, while he had been with

DISAPPEARANCE OF A PATRIOT 19

her, his veins had run fire; while he had been apart from her, all his pleasures had seemed tasteless. Who was she? Whence had she come? Whither was she going? What had been her business on the *Ryndam*, and what had Prince Rogovich known about her? The Prince had known something—something which had given him power over her. At a glance from him, her caprice had vanished and she had become downcast as a child. He had muttered a few unintelligible words, probably in Polish, and her pride had crumbled.

Hindwood was at a loss to account for these signs of a secret understanding. It had been he who had introduced them. It had been Santa who had confessed to curiosity about the Prince and had begged for the introduction. The moment he had made them acquainted, they had seemed to become delighted with each other's company—so delighted that there had been times when he himself had felt excluded. A half-humorous rivalry for Santa's favors had sprung up between the Prince and himself. This atmosphere of jealousy had been accentuated by the behavior of the wolfhound; Santa's mere approach had been sufficient to rouse him into fury. He had become so dangerous that he had had to be sent below whenever she was present.

And yet, despite her manifest efforts to hold the Prince enchanted, behind his back she had expressed the most vigorous aversion. She had spoken of his reputation for treachery and the whispers that went the rounds of his heartlessness toward women. Dur-

ing the final days of the voyage she had partly atoned for this inconsistency by appealing to Hindwood to protect her against the Prince's far too pressing attention. She had declared herself to be in some kind of danger—though what kind, whether moral or physical, she had left him to conjecture. She had rather flattered him by her appeal; nevertheless, he had been considerably surprised to observe how little interest she had still displayed in protecting herself. During the whole of that last day, while they had been approaching the white line of Cornish coast, she had scarcely devoted to him a glance or a word; every minute she had spent with His Highness, whom she professed to regard with so much terror. She had created the impression of employing every trick at her disposal in a frantic attempt to secure him as her conquest.

If, as many of the passengers had asserted, the presence of Santa Gorlof and the Prince on the same boat had been no accident, then what had been the object of their elaborately planned deception? Were they lovers who had chosen this secret method of traveling in order to avoid a scandal? Or was she one of the many women whom he was reported to have abandoned, who had seized the leisure of an Atlantic voyage as an opportunity for reinstating herself in his affection?

As Hindwood listened in the darkness to the Prince's name being shouted and waited for the tug to cast off, the surmise strengthened into certainty

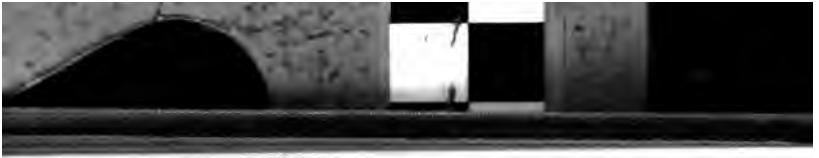
that he had been the dupe of a piece of play-acting, the purpose of which he could not fathom.

III

“Philip!”

He had been so absorbed in his thoughts that he had not noticed how she had stolen up behind him. Without removing his arms from the rail, he turned slowly and surveyed her.

An enviable woman! And her age? Perhaps thirty. She was probably a Slav—either Russian or Polish. Her face was smooth as marble, high cheek-boned and golden in complexion. Her eyes were almond-shaped, heavy-lidded, and of the palest gray. Her lips were passionate and always a little parted, revealing a line of perfect whiteness like a streak of snow between the curling edges of two rose-petals. But it was her hair that was her glory—abundant as night, blue-black as steel, and polished as metal. She wore it simply, gathered back from her forehead and caught in a loose knot, low against her neck. There was an air of indefinable aristocracy about her; perhaps it was the slightness of her figure and the alert composure of her carriage. And then there was a touch of the exotic, wistfully sad, yet exceedingly mocking. Like so many Slavs, behind the European there lurked a hint of the Asiatic. If her eyes had been darker, she might easily have passed for a Hindoo princess.



Her fascination, quite apart from her beauty, lay in the fact that she was so ravishingly feminine. To be a woman was her proud profession—and in this again she was Asiatic. What hours she must have spent over pampering her body! She was sleek and groomed as a race-horse. Physically she was the last word in feminine perfection. Her string of pearls was worth more than most men earn in a lifetime. Her sables represented the year's income of a millionaire. There was no item of her attire that was not sumptuous and that had not been acquired regardless of expense. To have achieved her luxuriance of beauty must have dissipated a fortune. Whose fortune? Surely, not hers!

His mind was haunted by misgivings as he watched her. He had so nearly allowed himself to care for her. It was only her lightness and willful inconsiderateness that had prevented. But now that he had been prevented, her employment of his Christian name struck him as singularly inappropriate. It made him suspect a trap. It put him in a mood to interpret any tenderness on her part as strategy, as a signal that something was wanted.

While he eyed her in silence, she drew nearer and leaned across the rail. Her shoulder pressed him. He was aware of the tingling sensation of her warmth, like a little hand caressing. He caught her fragrance, secret and somnolent as the magic of hidden rose-gardens in Damascus.

She spoke. Her voice was deep and foreign; it seemed too deep to be pent in so slight a body. It

DISAPPEARANCE OF A PATRIOT 23

was harsh in many of its tones, as though there had been times when it had been parched with thirst. It conjured visions of caravans creeping across molten deserts. It was hypnotic, barbaric. In listening to it, he lost sight of the exquisite sophistication of her appearance. His imagination reclothed her, loosening her hair, veiling her face, shrouding her in a robe of gold and saffron, slipping sandals on her feet and making her ankles tinkle with many bangles.

"You don't like me any more. Is it not so?" she questioned softly. "My master is offended."

He shook himself irritably, as though he were flinging off the yoke of her attraction. "I'm not offended. I was thinking."

"About what?"

"Prince Rogovich."

"And why should my master be thinking of Prince Rogovich?"

He leaned still further across the rail in an instinctive effort to avoid her. There was seduction in the feigned humility with which she addressed him, as though he were a Pasha and she a slave-girl.

"Because," he said, "it would be indecent for me to be thinking of anything else. He may be dead. There's no knowing. This time last night I could walk and talk and laugh with him. He was full of plans. He was something real that I could touch. To-night he has vanished."

"Vanished!" She repeated the word with a sigh which was almost of contentment.

"I was wondering," he continued, and then halted.

"You were wondering?" she prompted.

Drawing himself erect, he faced her. Her bantering tone had roused his indignation. Yet, even in his revulsion, he thrilled to the sweetness of her luring eyes, glinting at him palely through the shadows.

"He was more your friend, much more your friend, than mine," he reproached her. "There's probably been a tragedy. Yet you don't seem to care. One might even believe you were glad."

"Not glad. Not exactly." She spoke smilingly, averting her eyes. "But as for caring—why should I?"

He laughed quietly. "Yes, why should you? Why should you care what happens to any man?"

"But I hated him," she protested. "He had given me cause to hate him."

"You had a strange way of showing it. You made yourself most amazingly charming. He could never have guessed—no one could ever have guessed who watched you with him, that you—"

"Ah, no. Only you and I—we knew. It wasn't our business to let everybody guess."

Suddenly she seemed to divine what was troubling him. Darting out her hand, she seized his wrist in a grip of steel. That such strength lay hidden in so frail a hand was unexpected. Her attitude instantly changed to one of coaxing.

"You're jealous. Don't be jealous. It had to be, and it's ended. In a sense it was for your sake that it had to happen."

DISAPPEARANCE OF A PATRIOT 25

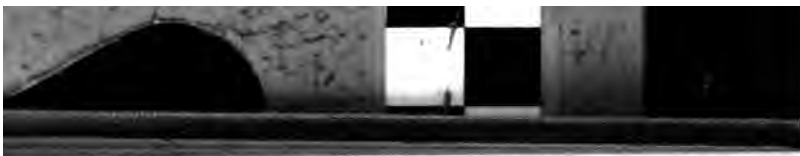
Leisurely he freed himself, bending back her fingers and taking pleasure in demonstrating that his strength was the greater.

"I've no idea what you're talking about," he said coldly. "Your feelings toward Prince Rogovich are none of my concern. If, by the thing that had to happen, you refer to the shameless way in which you made love to him, I can not conceive any possible set of circumstances that would make it necessary for you to make love for my sake to another man."

He had turned and was sauntering away from her. She went after him breathlessly, arresting him once more with the secret strength of her slim, gloved hand.

"To make love to him! I didn't mean that."

What it was that she had meant, she had no time to tell. The siren of the *Ryndam* burst into an ear-splitting blast, impatient, repeated, and agonizing. At the signal gangplanks were withdrawn from the tug and run back into dark holes in the side of the liner. Ropes were cast off and coiled. Engines began to quicken and screws to churn. The narrow channel which had separated the two vessels commenced to widen. On the *Ryndam* the band struck up. Above its lively clamor the sound of Prince Rogovich's name being shouted could still be heard. As Hindwood stared up at the floating mammoth, scanning the tiers of faces gaping down, even at this last moment he half expected to see the Prince come rushing out. Instead a sight much stranger met his eyes.



The tug was backing away to get sufficient clearance to turn in the direction of land. She had not quite cleared herself, when signs of frenzied disturbance were noticeable on the promenade deck. The musicians were dropping their instruments and fleeing. Passengers were glancing across their shoulders and scattering in all directions. In the vacant space which their stampede had created, the infuriated head of the Prince's wolfhound reared itself. For a couple of seconds he hung there poised, glaring down; then suddenly he seemed to descry the object he was searching. Steadying himself, he shot straight out into the gulf of blackness. In a white streak, like the finger of conscience pointing, he fell, just missing the deck of the tug, where Hindwood and his companion were standing. He must have struck the side, for as he reached the water he sank.

It was over in less time than it takes to tell, but it had seemed to Hindwood that as the hound had leaped, his burning gaze had been fixed on Santa Gorlof.

IV

She made no sound while the danger lasted, but the moment the hurtling, white body had fallen short, she rushed to the side, peering down into the yeasty scum of churned-up blackness. She was speaking rapidly in a foreign language, laughing softly with malicious triumph and shaking a small, clenched fist at the night. It was thus that a woman at

DISAPPEARANCE OF A PATRIOT 27

Jezeel must have looked, when she painted her face and tired her hair and leaned out of her palace window, jeering at the charioteer who had been sent to slay her. The passionate eloquence of Santa's gestures thrilled as much as it shocked Hindwood; it made her appearance of lavish modernity seem a disguise. And yet he admired her more than ever; it was her courage he admired. Putting his arm about her roughly,

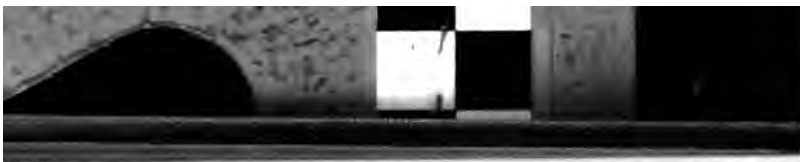
"Enough," he said. "You're coming inside."

She darted back her head in defiance like a serpent about to strike. Then recognition of him dawned in her eyes. She ceased to struggle and relaxed against his breast. It was only for a second. Slipping her arm submissively into his,

"Very well. If you say so," she whispered.

Guiding her steps across the slippery deck, he pushed open the door of a little saloon and entered. The atmosphere was blue with wreaths of smoke and heavy with the smell of tobacco. At a table in the center, beneath a swinging lamp, the immigration officers were dealing cards and settling their debts with pennies. They were too absorbed in their petty gambling to notice what was going on about them. In a corner, outside the circle of light, he found a trunk and ordered her to sit down. The meekness with which she complied flattered his sense of her dependence. He might really have been a Pasha and she his slave-girl.

He did not understand her. She cozened and baffled him. People and things which he did not un-



derstand were apt to rouse his resentment, especially when they were women. His distrust of the sex was inherent. But as he watched this woman drooping in the shadows, his pity came uppermost. She was so alone, so unprotected. The hour was late—long past midnight. Her storm of emotion had exhausted her. It was absurd that he should have allowed himself to become so jealous. He could never have made her his wife. The chances were, she would not have accepted him; she belonged to a more modish world. And if she had, she would have driven him from his course with her whims and tempests. She would have wrecked his career with her greed for wealthy trappings. He and she were utterly different. They had nothing in common but their physical attraction.

He was seeing things clearly. With each fresh whiff of land, affairs were regrouping themselves in their true perspective. He had been the shuttlecock of a shipboard flirtation. He had magnified infatuation into a grand passion. On many a previous voyage he had been the amused spectator of just such profitless expenditures of sentiment. And here he was, a victim of the same foolishness! The futility of the ending was the adventure's condemnation. Probably she was indulging in similar reflections! Within an hour of stepping ashore they would have lost sight of each other forever. After so much intimacy and misplaced emotion, they would walk out of each other's life without regret. Partly out of curiosity, but more out of courtesy, he seated

DISAPPEARANCE OF A PATRIOT 29

himself beside her for what he intended should be their last conversation.

"What happens next?"

She clutched her furs more closely about her. "I don't know."

"But you must know," he persisted. "What I meant was, where is your destination?"

"London." Then she added wearily, "You could have discovered by examining my labels."

Her fatigue made him the more determined to be helpful. "I didn't ask out of impertinence, but because I thought it would be London. Probably there'll be no train to London to-night. If the Prince had been with us, they'd have put on a special, but you and I are the only passengers, and neither of us is sufficiently important. Besides, after this delay, it'll be nearly daylight before we clear the Customs."

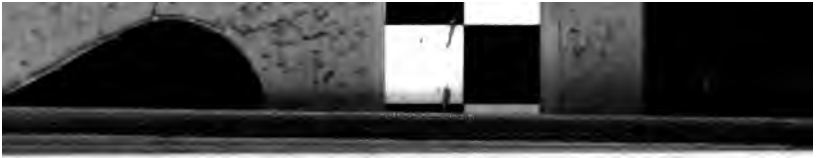
"Then I'll have to sleep in Plymouth."

"Perhaps you'll be met by friends?"

He had no sooner hazarded the suggestion than an obvious conjecture flashed through his mind. The marvel was that it had not flashed earlier. *She might be married.* If the conjecture proved correct, it would put the final punishing touch of satire to this wild-goose romance.

Sweeping him with her pale, derisive eyes, "Friends!" she murmured. "You may set your mind at rest. I shall be met by no friends."

After that there was silence, a silence interrupted at intervals by the exclamations of the players as



30 THE VANISHING POINT

they thumped down their cards and raked in their pennies.

For relief he reverted to the subject uppermost in both their minds. "I wonder what became of him."

"I wonder." Her tone betrayed no interest.

"I've been trying to think back," he said, "trying to remember when last I saw him."

"Yes."

"I believe I last saw him alive just after——"

She spun round, as though jerked on wires. "Alive! Who suggests that he isn't alive?"

"No one. I'm the first. But if he isn't found by to-morrow, the suggestion will be on the lips of all the world."

"I doubt it."

"You do?" Hindwood smiled. "Men of the Prince's eminence are not allowed to vanish without a stir. I'm only hoping that you and I are not involved in it. We were the only people with whom he associated on the voyage. We're likely to be detained and certain to be questioned. For all we know the air's full of Marconi messages about us at this moment."

Her face had gone white. "About us? What had we to do with it?"

"Nothing. But when a tragedy of this sort occurs, we're all liable to be suspected."

She gazed at him intently. "Then you think there was a tragedy?"

"I feel sure of it. It's my belief that he either

DISAPPEARANCE OF A PATRIOT 31

fell or was pushed overboard. Somewhere out there in the darkness he's bobbing up and down. It's almost as though I could see him. I couldn't feel more sure if——"

She shuddered and pressed against him. "You're trying to frighten me. I won't be frightened. It's all nonsense what you're saying. Why should any one want to push him over?"

"I'm sorry," he apologized. "I didn't mean to frighten you. Perhaps we're wasting our breath and already he's been found."

"No, but why should any one want to push him over?" she urged.

"I can't answer that. But he wasn't liked. One could be fascinated by his personality, but one couldn't like him. Take yourself—weren't you telling me a few minutes ago how intensely you hated him?"

She nodded. "He was the sort of man every woman had the right to hate." After a pause she faced him, completely mistress of herself. "When did you last see him?"

"I'm not certain." Hindwood hesitated. "As far as I remember, it was after dinner in the lounge. He was giving some instructions about his baggage. When did you?"

"After dinner in the lounge." Her eyes met his and flickered. "It must have been shortly after eight, for I spent till ten in my stateroom finishing my packing."

Before she had made an end, he knew that she had

lied. Several times after dinner he had walked past her stateroom, hoping for a last encounter. Her trunks and cases had been piled in the passage, already locked and strapped. He had tried to discover from the stewardess her whereabouts and had been told that since dining she had not returned. He had gone on deck in search of her, hunting everywhere. It must have been shortly after ten that he had come across two shadowy figures in the bows. They were whispering together. They might have been embracing. The man's figure had been too dim for him to identify, but he could have sworn that the woman's was hers.

He had reached this point in his piecing together of evidence, when he noticed that the card-players were pushing back their chairs.

Santa touched his arm gently. "I think we're there."

The next moment the soft bump of the tug against the piles confirmed the news of their arrival.

V

It began to look as if all hope of rest would have to be abandoned. At the moment of landing the dock had been almost festive. There had been a group of railway officials, mildly beaming and fussily important, who had approached Hindwood as he stepped ashore, with "Prince Rogovich, if we are not mistaken?" There had been another group of

DISAPPEARANCE OF A PATRIOT 33

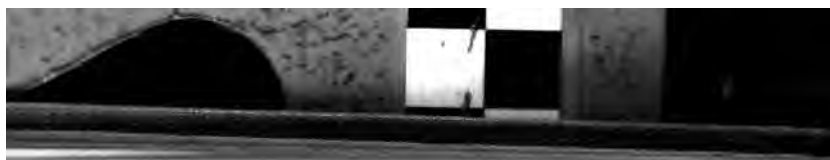
newspaper reporters who, having addressed him as "Your Highness," and having discovered their error, had promptly turned their backs on him.

There had been a Major in uniform, with a monocle in his eye, who had pranced up, tearing off a salute and announcing, "I'm detailed by the Foreign Office, your Excellency."

When they had learned that the Prince had unaccountably avoided Plymouth, their atmosphere of geniality faded. The special train, which was to have borne him swiftly to London, was promptly canceled. Within ten minutes, muttering with disgust, all the world except two porters had dribbled off into the night.

In the waiting-room where, pending the inspection of the Customs officers, Hindwood and Santa were ordered to remain, their reception was no more enlivening. At first, when they had entered, a lunch-counter had been spread, gleaming with warmth and light. Before mirrors, girl attendants had been self-consciously reviewing their appearance with smiles of brightest expectation. Their expectancy had been quickly dulled by the news of the Prince's non-arrival. They had scarcely spared time to supply the wants of the two travelers before they had started to close up. The ticket clerk had copied the girls' example. As he had pulled down the shutter of his office he had briefly stated, "No train till the eight-thirty in the morning."

After that they had been left—he and this strange woman—in the drafty gloom of the ill-lighted dock-



34 THE VANISHING POINT

station. The two porters had huddled down and snored among the baggage; Santa, closing her eyes, had appeared to join them in their slumbers.

At last a solitary Customs officer had arrived. He volunteered no explanation for his delay. He was evidently newly risen, half awake, and in a mood of suppressed irritation. His examination was perfunctory. Having completed his barest duty, he likewise made his exit. It was then, when all their troubles seemed ended, that the porters had informed them that it was necessary for passengers to see their luggage weighed and personally to supervise its being loaded in the van for London.

Hindwood turned to his companion. "You're tired. You'd better be off to bed. I'll see this through for you."

Half an hour later, when he had complied with all formalities and was free to seek a bed himself, he remembered that he hadn't inquired where she would be staying and that he didn't know the name of a hotel. Wondering where he should sleep and how he could reach her with the receipts for her trunks, he wandered out into the yard of the station. The first grayness of dawn was spreading. A chill was in the air. Behind the sepulchers of muted houses a cock was crowing. He gazed up and down. Near the gate a horse-drawn cab was standing. Its lamp burned dimly, on the point of flickering out. The driver sat hunched on the box; the horse hung dejectedly between the shafts. They both slumbered immovably.

DISAPPEARANCE OF A PATRIOT 35

Crossing the yard, he shook the man's arm. "Hi! Wake up. I want you to drive me to a good hotel."

The man came to with a jerk. "A good 'otel! That's wot the lady wanted. You must be the gen'leman I wuz told to wait for."

Hindwood nodded. "So you've driven the lady already! Then you'd better take me to wherever you took her."

He had opened the door and was in the act of entering when the horse started forward, making him lose his balance. As he stretched out his hands to steady himself, what was his surprise to discover that the cab was already tenanted!

VI

"I beg your pardon."

There was no reply to his apology. He repeated it in a tone of more elaborate courtesy, "I *beg* your pardon."

When he was again greeted with silence, he added: "I thought it was empty. I didn't do it on purpose. I hope you're not hurt."

In the mildewed square of blackness, rank with the smell of stables, he held his breath, trying to detect whether sleep would account for the taciturnity of the other occupant. He could detect nothing; all lesser sounds were drowned in the rattle of their progress. Groping, he felt a woman's dress. Hollowing his hand to shade the flame, he struck a

match. For a brief moment his eyes met hers, opened wide and gazing at him. Instantly she leaned forward, pursing her lips. The flame went out.

"What's the meaning of this?" He had been startled and spoke with sharpness.

"There was only one cab, so I——" She yawned luxuriously. "So I waited. I didn't want to lose you."

It was his turn to be silent. After a pause, while she gave him a chance to reply, she continued: "You'd have been stranded if I'd taken the only cab. And then I didn't want to lose you. Not that losing me would have meant anything to you—not now. It wouldn't, would it?"

There was no escape. However she chose to accuse him, he would be forced to listen. But it couldn't be far to the hotel. Speaking reasonably, he attempted to appease her. "I've given you no occasion for supposing——"

She laughed softly. "Don't you think so? On the boat you were burning up for me. You were molten—incandescent. Now you're dark and dank—through with me."

She caught her breath. Though he could not see her, he knew that her small, clenched fists were pressed against her mouth. Again she was speaking.

"Why is it? If you'd only give me a reason! While I've been sitting here alone, I've kept asking myself: 'Why is it? Am I less beautiful, less kind, less good? Does he think that he's discovered some-

DISAPPEARANCE OF A PATRIOT 37

thing evil about me? What have I done that he should have changed so suddenly?"

With a cry of pain, she turned. "What have I done? It's just that you should tell me. If you'll take me back, I'll be anything for you. I'll try so hard to be more beautiful."

"You couldn't be more beautiful."

It was said without enthusiasm. The suspicion still possessed him that she was play-acting. Last evening she had practiced these same wiles on the man who had vanished. Did she intend that he should vanish, too? It was horrible that he should ask himself such a question, and yet he could not rid his imagination of the snow-white hound, plunging to death and pointing at her like the finger of conscience. The happenings of that night had been sufficiently dramatic, so why this second rehearsal? He was too humble in his self-esteem to believe that his own attractions could account for such a storm of passion.

"Santa, you're exaggerating." He spoke cautiously. "You never belonged to me. Until now you've given no hint that you wanted to belong to me. On the contrary, you've trifled with me and shown a distinct preference for another man. It's preposterous for you to talk about my taking you back when I never had you. We've been companions for a handful of hours. We've liked being together—at least, I have. But to create such a scene is absurd. Nothing warrants it. In the ordinary course of events, our liking might strengthen into

love—there's no telling. But everything'll end right here and now if you force matters. What d'you know about me? About you I know even less. If any one were to ask me, I couldn't tell him whether you were a Pole or a Persian, or whether you were single, divorced, or married. I haven't the least idea of your social standing or why, while appearing so prosperous, you travel without a maid and by yourself. For all I know——”

“A man needs to know nothing about a woman,” she interrupted, “except that he loves her. She might be a thousand things; if he loved her, none of them would count. If she were bad, he would hope to make her good with his own goodness. Men always expect women to do that; why shouldn't a woman expect it of a man? If you loved me—and you did love me—no matter how wicked you thought me, even though you believed I'd killed some one, you wouldn't care. You'd find some splendid motive and persuade yourself that I'd done it for the best.”

She broke off. Then she added, “Of course, I haven't.”

“Haven't!”

“Haven't killed somebody.”

It was an extraordinary disclaimer—as though it were always within the bounds of possibility that nice, conventional women might have killed somebody. She had said it as casually as another woman might have said, “I don't powder,” or “I don't smoke.”

He scarcely knew whether to be shocked or

DISAPPEARANCE OF A PATRIOT 39

amused. He was loath to take her seriously. Behind the thinning darkness he was trying to discover her expression, when his calmness was swept away by a new disturbance. She had slipped to her knees in the narrow space. By the dim light that streaked the panes he could just make out her figure, bowed against him. The next moment her tears were falling, and she was kissing his hands.

"You mustn't, Santa."

He tried to withdraw his hands. She clung to them. Failing in that, he attempted to raise her face. She kept it obstinately averted. The bumping of the cab on the uneven paving jostled her against him; he feared lest inadvertently he might bruise her. The situation was grotesque. It stirred both his pity and his anger. If this were play-acting, then it was laughter and not sobbing that was shaking her. But if her grief were real——

At that thought the shy, lonely tenderness of the man overwhelmed him. Here at last was a fellow-creature who needed his affection. She was so fragile, so capricious, so rapturous!

"Poor Santa! I didn't mean—— Somehow I've hurt you."

She didn't speak, but she stayed her sobbing.

"Let me see your face."

He stooped lower. The scent of her hair was in his nostrils. His reluctant arms went about her. Their embrace strengthened.

With a moan she lifted up her face, white and

ghostly as the dawn that was all about them. In a frenzy of silent longing their lips met.

VII

With a jerk the cab drew up against the pavement. Tossing the reins on the horse's back, the driver was lumbering down. That Santa might have time to compose herself, Hindwood leaped quickly out, slamming the door behind him.

"Where've you brought us?"

"It's a good 'otel," the man grumbled, on the defensive, staring at the gray cliff of shrouded windows. "It was a good 'otel you wanted. And then it's h'opposite the London Station where the train starts in the marnin'. It'll give the missis ten minutes extry in bed."

"The missis!" Hindwood frowned. "If you refer to the lady who's with me, she's not my 'missis."

The man became sly. Stretching a fat finger along his nose, he edged nearer and whispered: "Between you and me that's h'alright. Wot wiv drivin' so many gentry from the Contingnong me own morals are almost foreign."

Hindwood turned from him coldly. "You're on the wrong tack. And now how does one get into this hotel? Will they admit us at such an hour?"

"H'at h'all hours. H'absolutely h'at h'all hours."

"If that's the case," he thrust his head inside the cab, "you stay here, Santa. I'll go and find out."

DISAPPEARANCE OF A PATRIOT 41

In a few minutes he was back. "They'll take us. Go inside and wait while I settle with the driver."

When he joined her at the desk, he found it necessary to make the same explanation that he had already made to the cabman. The night-porter had allotted them one room, taking it for granted they were married. He had to be informed that two were required.

"D'you want 'em on the same floor and next to each other?"

"On the roof if you like," Hindwood answered impatiently, "only let us get to bed. We're, or rather *I'm* catching the eight-thirty train to London in the morning, and it's nearly daylight now. How about you?" He turned to Santa. "What train are you catching?"

"The same as you."

"Then we might as well breakfast together?"

She nodded.

Turning again to the night-porter, he said, "Put us both down for a call at seven."

The man was leading the way upstairs. As they followed, Santa whispered,

"You see, you were mistaken."

"How?"

"You threatened that we'd be detained and questioned. You frightened me terribly. We weren't."

"No. We weren't."

She slipped her arm through his companionably. "I feel so relieved and happy. I don't believe there was a tragedy. The Prince changed his mind at the

last moment; he's landing at Boulogne or Rotterdam. It may even have been a strategy to mislead some enemy who was waiting for him here in Plymouth."

"Perhaps. I never thought of that."

Their rooms were on different floors. The porter showed the way to hers first. Now that they had to separate, Hindwood would have given much for a private word with her. Discreetly, outside her door, in the presence of the night-porter, they parted.

"Then we meet at breakfast," he reminded her.

"At breakfast," she assented. "And let's hope that we don't oversleep ourselves."

VIII

It seemed to him that his head had just touched the pillow when he was awakened by his door being pounded. Sitting up in bed, he consulted his watch. Seven exactly!

"I'm awake," he shouted. With that he jumped out of bed to prevent himself from drowsing.

His first thought was of her; again he was going to meet her. The prospect filled him with excitement, but not with gladness. His dreams had been troubled by her; there had been no moment since he had closed his eyes that he had been without her. The wildness of that kiss, bestowed in the dark by a woman humbling herself, had set his blood on fire. It was not right that a man should be kissed like that,

DISAPPEARANCE OF A PATRIOT 43

and yet he longed to reëxperience the sensation.

"Any woman could have done it," he argued. "This isn't love; it's nothing peculiar to Santa. Any reasonably beautiful woman could have done it by acting the way she acted. I had consoled myself that I was immune from women. I was starving, and I didn't know it."

His sane mind warned him that it would be wise to avoid further encounters. She was too alluring for him to withstand. There were too many things about her that were unaccountable. There was her frenzied display of infatuation for both himself and the Prince, all within the space of twelve hours.

He was brushing his hair and viewing his reflection in the shabby mirror, when he reached this point. He stopped brushing and regarded his reflection intently. What could any woman discover in those features to go mad over? It was a hard face, clean-shaven, bony, and powerful, roughened by the wind and tanned by the sun. It was the mask of an ascetic, which concealed rather than revealed the emotions. And yet once it had been sensitive; you could trace that in the kindly blueness of the eyes and the faint tenderness of the full-lipped mouth. The hair was a rusty brown, growing thin about the temples; the nose was pinched at the nostrils with long-endured suffering—the brow furrowed. He smiled in amused disapproval and went on with his brushing. Not the face of an Apollo! Nothing to rave about!

And yet, despite his looks, here was at least one

woman who, for whatever reason, was desperate to marry him. On the drive through the dawn from the dock to the hotel she had left no doubt of her intentions. It inflamed his curiosity. Though he was nearing forty, with the exception of that one disastrous affair, women were still for him an untried adventure. But in the case of Santa, to indulge his curiosity further might lead to penalties. She was liable to repeat last night's performance; the journey to London would probably provide her with a fitting opportunity. If it did, could he muster the cruelty to refuse her?

On one point his mind was made up: he would not marry her. He had no time to waste on marriage. With her it would be folly. Moreover, while her breaking down of reticences had spurred his eagerness, it had forfeited his respect. It had robbed him of his prerogative of conquest. It had changed him from the hunter into the hunted. He was all but trapped.

"Trapped!"

He was fastening his bag. He pressed the catch into the lock and stood up.

"Trapped! Not yet. Not exactly."

Immediately his mind began to race, devising plans for eluding capture. He didn't need to keep his breakfast appointment with her. He could miss the eight-thirty and travel to London later. He could slip out unnoticed and take up his abode in another hotel. Once he had lost her, he would have

DISAPPEARANCE OF A PATRIOT 45

put himself beyond temptation. She would have no clew to his whereabouts, nor he to hers.

As he passed slowly down the stairs, he was still undecided as to how he should act. On arriving in the hall, he loitered by the hotel desk, half determined to call for his reckoning and make a bolt for it. While he dallied, the yearning to see her for a last time swam uppermost. After all, he owed something to the only woman who had paid him the compliment of loving him. He would not speak to her, would not let her know that he was there. He would peep into the room unseen and remember her always as waiting for him.

Bag in hand, he strode along the passage to the coffee-room, where breakfast was being served. The baize doors were a-swing with scurrying waiters. Stooping, he peered through the panes. Pushing the doors slightly open, he gazed more steadily. The room was littered with ungroomed people, their heads bowed, their elbows flapping, like a flock of city sparrows snatching crumbs from beneath the hoofs of passing traffic. Nowhere could he espy her, his rarer bird of the dainty plumage.

He grew ashamed of his furtiveness. Why should he be afraid of her? She shouldn't be disappointed. She should find him gallantly expecting her. Resigning his bag to a solicitous bell-boy, he drew himself up to his lean western height and entered.

IX

Seated at a table, he had watched the swing-doors for a full half-hour. He had finished his breakfast. If he were to catch the eight-thirty, it was time for him to be moving. He began to flirt with the idea of postponing his journey; it was evident she had overslept herself.

At the desk, while he settled his account, he had it on the tip of his tongue to inquire for her, but he was daunted by the presence of the night-porter. The man kept eyeing him with a knowing grin, as though he were expecting just such a question.

"I won't gratify him," Hindwood thought. "The fellow knows too much. It's fate, if I miss her."

He crossed the road to the station. Having secured a seat in a first-class smoker, he roamed up and down the platform. Every few minutes he consulted his watch as the hands circled nearer to the half-hour. He bought papers at the news-stand and returned to buy more papers; from there, while not seeming to do so, he could obtain a clear view of the hotel. And still there was no sign of her.

When it was almost too late, he threw caution to the winds. At a gait between a run and a walk, he recrossed the road and dashed up the hotel steps. As he confronted the clerk behind the desk, he was a little breathless; he was also aware that the night-porter's grin had widened.

DISAPPEARANCE OF A PATRIOT 47

"There's a lady staying here. She was to have traveled with me to London. I'm afraid she's not been wakened."

"A lady!" The clerk looked up with the bored expression of one who was impervious to romance. "A lady! Oh, yes."

"She's a passenger from the *Ryndam*," he continued. "Her name's Miss Gorlof. Send some one to her room to find out at once——"

The night-porter interrupted. Addressing the clerk, he said: "The gentleman means the foreign-looking lady wot I told you about—the one in all the furs." Then to Hindwood, "She was called for at six this mornin'. A gentleman in goggles, who couldn't speak no English, arrived in a tourin' car and drove off with 'er."

"Drove off with her. But——"

Realizing that too much emotion would make him appear ridiculous, he steadied his voice and asked casually, "I suppose she left a note for me?"

The clerk glanced across his shoulder at the rack. "Your name's Mr. Hindwood, isn't it?" He raised his hand to a pigeonhole lettered "H". "You can see for yourself, sir. There's nothing in it."

"Then perhaps it was a verbal message. She would be certain to leave me her address."

The clerk turned to the night-porter. "Did she?"

The night-porter beamed with satisfaction. "She did not."

He had achieved his dramatic effect.

X

He was the last passenger to squeeze through the barrier. As he scrambled into his carriage, the train was on the point of moving. Spreading one of his many papers on his knees, he lit a cigarette. He believed he was behaving as though nothing had happened. "That I can take it like this proves that she was nothing to me," he assured himself.

Ten minutes later he discovered that he had not read a line and that the cigarette had gone out.

"I suppose I'm a bit upset," he admitted, "though goodness knows why I should be. The matter's ended exactly as I wanted."

But had it? What had he wanted? Does a man ever know what he wants where a woman is concerned? He desires most the thing which he most dreads. During the voyage he had wanted to win her from Prince Rogovich. On the tug he had wanted to forget her. In the cab he had wanted to go on kissing her forever. That morning he had wanted to save his freedom. On the station, like a maddened schoolboy, his terror had been lest he might lose her.

As a result he had lost her. Somewhere through the sunny lanes of Devon she was speeding with the gentleman who "couldn't speak no English" and wore goggles. In which direction and for what purpose he could not guess.

He smiled bitterly. It was a situation which

DISAPPEARANCE OF A PATRIOT 49

called for mirth. He had accused her of having trapped him at a time when she herself had been escaping from him. He had complained that her affection was too ardently obvious at a moment when she was proving herself most coldly elusive. While he had been resenting the way in which he was being hunted, she had already abandoned him to hunt to his heart's content.

His reflections were broken in upon by a weak-eyed old clergyman seated opposite to him in the far corner.

"Excuse me, but I see by your labels that you've just landed. May I ask whether your vessel was the *Ryndam*?"

"It was."

"Then there's an item in the local paper which should interest you. It has to do with Prince Rogovich, the great Polish patriot. He was your fellow passenger, if I'm not mistaken."

Hindwood was disinclined for conversation. He made his tone brusque that he might discourage further questions. "You're not mistaken, and I guess I know what you're going to tell me: that after all the preparations made for his reception, the Prince didn't land at Plymouth but, without notifying any one, traveled on either to Boulogne or Rotterdam."

"But that wasn't what I was going to tell you," the old gentleman continued in his benevolent pulpit manner. "Oh, no, I was going to tell you something quite different. After the *Ryndam* left Plymouth,

the Captain had her searched from stem to stern. Not a trace of the Prince could be found."

"Extraordinary! I suppose the news was received by wireless. Does the paper suggest an explanation?"

"None whatsoever. I thought you'd be interested. Perhaps you'd like to read for yourself."

The paper contained the bare fact as the clergyman had stated it. "A complete search was made. All his personal belongings were found intact, but of the Prince himself not a trace."

Hindwood closed his eyes and pretended to sleep that he might protect himself from further intrusions. He wanted to argue his way through this problem and to acquit Santa of any share in what had happened. And yet, if an investigation were held and he himself had to tell all he knew, things would look black for her. Was that why—?

He tried to crush the ugly thought, but it clamored to be expressed. Was that why she had made love to him—that her kiss might seal his lips with silence?

The train was slowing down. He opened his eyes. In the cheerfulness of sunshine life took on a more normal aspect. Towering above crowded roofs of houses, a tall cathedral pricked the blueness of the sky.

"Where are we?"

The clergyman was collecting his bundles. "Exeter—where I alight."

As soon as he had the carriage to himself, before

DISAPPEARANCE OF A PATRIOT 51

any one could enter, he reached up to the rack and quickly removed the *Ryndam* labels from his bag. Having done that, he stepped to the platform and went in search of papers. The torn labels were still in his hand. Surreptitiously he dropped them between the train and the platform, some distance lower down than his own carriage. He realized the stealth he had employed only when Exeter was left behind.

"Ridiculous!" he shrugged his shoulders. "It's getting on my nerves."

In his most recently acquired batch of papers he found no reference to the topic which absorbed him. At the time when the London press had been published, the disappearance of the Prince had not been known to the world.

Throughout the journey, at every fresh stopping-place, he repeated the performance, dashing down platforms in quest of newsboys and purchasing copies of every journal on sale. He caught himself continually eyeing his bag to make sure that he really had removed all labels. He began to feel as if he himself were the criminal. In his intentions he was already an accessory after the fact. Whether Santa was innocent or guilty, at all costs he had determined to shield her.

Through the late summer afternoon, as he drew nearer to London, his suspense began to die. He was getting the later editions now; none of them so much as mentioned the affair. In Plymouth and

Bristol it had probably been of local importance. He took courage to smile. What a coward dread can make of an honest man!

Afternoon was fading into the gold of evening when they steamed into Paddington. By making haste he could just reach the American Embassy before closing time. It was likely that several communications had been addressed to him there. He had cabled ahead to the Ritz for a reservation. It wouldn't take him far out of his direction to call at the Embassy on the way to his hotel.

In the stir and bustle of familiar London, the nightmare of the voyage grew vague. He stepped from the carriage like a man awaking. It thrilled him with happy surprise to discover the old gray city, plumed with smoke and smiling, waiting unchanged beneath his feet to welcome him. The very smell of mingled gasoline and horses from the cab-ranks was reassuring. Every sight that his eyes encountered made him feel respectable.

"Any luggage, sir?" It was a porter accosting him.

"Yes. Two trunks. At least, I guess they're on this train."

"Which van, sir?"

"The one from Plymouth." Then, with conscious bravado, he added: "I'm from the *Ryndam*. You'll recognize them by the Holland-American tags."

The porter had gone to secure a barrow. While Hindwood waited, gazing about him idly, his eyes



DISAPPEARANCE OF A PATRIOT 53

were startled by a news-placard bearing the following legend:

DISAPPEARANCE OF A PRINCE FOUL PLAY SUSPECTED

He swayed, as though he had been struck by a bullet. He glanced round feverishly, fearing lest he might espy another placard stating, "Santa Gorlof Arrested." But no—for the moment she was safe. He thanked God for the touring-car and the forethought of the foreign gentleman who could speak no English.

Quickly he began to readjust his plans. If he went to claim his trunks, there was no telling by whom he might be met—newspaper men, detectives, officials from the Foreign Office. Moreover, Santa's trunks were in the van. When he had explained himself, he might be called upon to account for her absence. There was only one thing for him to do: for her sake he must get out of England. If he delayed, he might be prevented. It would be unwise for him to go to the Ritz; he must spend the night at some obscure hotel. The only place to which he might be traced was the Embassy; but he would have to risk that—it was of the utmost importance that he should pick up his communications.

He was on the point of making good his escape, when the porter trundled up with his barrow.



"Hi, mister! Where are you goin'? I'll be needin' you to identify 'em."

"I know you will." Hindwood turned on him a face which was flustered. "But I've just remembered I have an engagement. I'll send for them later. It'll make no difference to you; here's what I should have paid you."

The man, having inspected it carefully, pocketed the half-crown. "It won't take long," he suggested; "me and the barrow's ready. And it won't cost you nothink, secin' as how you've paid me."

"No time."

Without more ado, he made a dash for the nearest taxi. "As fast as you like," he told the driver; "the faster, the bigger your fare."

He fled out of the station at a forbidden rate, but after half a mile the taxi halted against the curb. Lowering the window, he looked out.

"What's the matter? Something wrong with your engine?"

"We ain't been follered. You can calm down," the driver assured him soothingly. "Wot's wrong is that you ain't told me no address."

"Stupid of me! The American Embassy."

At the Embassy, having explained his errand, he was requested to wait. Then, rather to his surprise, instead of having his letters handed to him, he was shown into a handsome room where, at the far end, a gray-haired man was seated, sorting papers behind a large mahogany table.

Hindwood crossed the room and held out his hand.

DISAPPEARANCE OF A PATRIOT 55

"I'm Philip Hindwood, the railroad expert. I guess you've heard of me. I called in case there was some mail for me. I had no intention of troubling you personally."

"I'm glad you've come," said the gray-haired man gravely. "If you hadn't troubled me, I should have had to trouble you. There have been inquiries for you. They have to do with a woman who goes by the name of Santa Gorlof. The police thought you might know something about her. It seems she's wanted."

CHAPTER THE SECOND

THE RETURN OF SANTA GORLOF

I

SO Santa was "wanted!" Why she was wanted Hindwood did not dare to question. And the police thought he could tell them something! He could, but it would be something to put them off her track. After kissing a woman, it wasn't likely he'd betray her. She might have committed every crime on the calendar; it would make no difference. He had learned his code of honor on the outskirts of civilization, where law is more often defied than obeyed. By his standards of chivalry, after what had passed between them, he had no option but to play the game by her. What did they think he knew? Why should they think he knew anything?

He masked his anxiety with seeming unconcern. Without his assistance, they could make little headway. He must let fall no hint that would suggest a sentimental interest in her fortunes. He would be spied on—probably he had been spied on already. For all he knew, the clergyman in the train, the porter at Paddington, the taxi-driver who had assured him that he wasn't followed, were detectives. Henceforward he must live his life normally and in public,

THE RETURN OF SANTA GORLOF 57

doing everything to disarm suspicion. Any divergence from his usual habits, such as staying in obscure quarters or canceling engagements that he might escape to the Continent, would create the impression that he was possessed of guilty knowledge. If he had to speak of her, he must refer to her as a charming acquaintance and profess horror that such a charge should have been brought against her.

Following this line, he left the Embassy with the promise that he would consult with the police at their earliest convenience. From there he drove to the Ritz, adhering to arrangements made before this sinister thing had happened. To avoid being waylaid, he went straight to his rooms, having ordered his trunks to be fetched from the station and his dinner to be served in his apartment.

The suite allotted him was one which he had occupied on several previous occasions. It soothed his ruffled pride to discover that his preferences had been remembered. From the front windows he could gaze down Piccadilly; from the side he could watch the green park, a lake of jade, imprisoned between walls of granite. In the panes facing westward a fairy city hung poised, tipped with flame and ensanguined by the sunset.

Leisurely he set to work to bathe and shave, stretching out the ritual and reveling in the recovery of his self-respect. Slowly the sunset faded. Before he had made an end, the golden September dusk was drifting down. In the twilight he stretched

himself on the bed, waiting for his trunks with his wardrobe to arrive. He felt that he could face the police with much more calmness if he was clad in the respectability of evening dress.

He must have dozed, for the room was completely dark when he was brought to his feet by the sharp ringing of the telephone. As he fumbled for the receiver, he thought, "Well, I've a good reason for not seeing them. Pajamas aren't dignified."

Aloud he said: "Yes. Quite correct—Mr. Hindwood. Yes, the Mr. Hindwood who's just landed from the *Ryndam*. You traced me by my trunks! You were expecting I'd claim them in person! The man from the Ritz is there! That's all right. Thank you for telling me. What was my reason?—Certainly not. I was avoiding no one. What did you say you were?—A newspaper-man!—I guess not. I've nothing to tell—no. That's final."

He had scarcely hung up when the bell commenced ringing again. The next half-hour was spent in refusing to be interviewed by invisible persons. It seemed as though every journalist in London were waiting in queue to get on to him. Some were suave, some bullying; all were persistent. Didn't he know that he owed it to the public to say something? If a list of questions was submitted to him, would he make a written statement?

To cut the clamor short, he instructed the hotel operator to allow no one to speak with him who would not state his business. For the rest of the evening he was "out" to any one who had to do with

THE RETURN OF SANTA GORLOF 59

the press. After that the telephone grew quiet.

He switched on the lights. As he did so, he noticed that he was trembling with excitement. He was furious. This assault had made him aware of the unseen wall of hostility by which he and Santa were surrounded. She hadn't a chance; the whole of organized society was against her. The odds were brutally unfair. Nothing that she had done could warrant such unsportsmanly cruelty. So far it had not been proved that she had done anything, yet every one was willing to prejudge her. The pursuit was cowardly. Whether he loved her did not matter. It was a problem in knight-errantry: to protect her he was willing to risk all that he was and had.

The arrival of his trunks gave him something else to think about. When he was dressed, he felt ready for every emergency. After all, he was not the criminal.

He had his dinner spread against a window from which he could watch the arc-lights of Piccadilly strung across the night like a rope of pearls. He tried to be persuaded that he was enjoying himself. If the police didn't call on him within the hour, he would saunter out to a music-hall and rub shoulders with the crowd.

But would he? To what purpose? He would have to go alone, as he always went. It would be different if she were with him. The last nine days had spoiled him for loneliness; they had taught him the romance of a woman's friendship. And yet, not friendship—she had asked for his affection. All his

life he had craved to give his love to some woman. Until he had met Santa, his craving had been denied. No woman had seemed to care. Because of that, in spite of success, he had reckoned himself a failure. He had attained everything—power, position, wealth—everything except his desire. There had been moments on the voyage when it had seemed to him that his goal was in sight.

If she were to tap on his door, how would he greet her? If she did, it would be like her; she could always be counted on to do the unexpected. He told himself that he would ask her no questions. He would not upbraid her. He would comfort her in the way that she understood best. When the police came to interrogate him, he would place his arm about her and answer:

“Gentlemen, if it is Santa Gorlof you are seeking, she is here. I have asked her to be my wife.”

The scene as he conjured it was worthy of Dumas; he was thrilled by the gallantry of his imagination. His ponderings were cut short by a sharp rap. He sprang to his feet; it almost seemed that his dream was to be realized. The rap was repeated. Outside the door a page was standing.

“There’s a gentleman downstairs. He won’t give his name. He says you left word, sir, at the American Embassy, that you would be willing to see him.”

“Show him up.”

II

Leaving the door ajar, he drew a chair to his desk and commenced rummaging through a pile of documents. He planned to create the impression that he regarded this visit as of small importance. He was anxious, even at the risk of appearing vulgar, to be discovered in the rôle of an American money-lord, every second of whose time represented dollars—the kind of man who was too influential to be bulldozed by the police methods of a country whose citizenship he did not share. He urged himself into a mood of contempt by recalling the beefy caricatures which pass currency in English fiction for veracious portraits of Scotland Yard detectives. This fellow would look like a constable off duty. When he sat down, he would bulge at the neck and mop his forehead with a multicolored handkerchief. He would be awed by elegance into sulky stupidity—but would become pompously affable when offered a cigar.

“May I enter?” The door creaked.

“Surely. Come in. But you must excuse me for a moment.” Hindwood spoke without turning. He pretended to be sorting the last of his documents. The cultured tone of the voice had surprised him. Perhaps, after all, his guest might not be a detective.

“Sorry to keep you. Time’s valuable. My stay in England is short. There, that’s finished. What

can I do for you?" He pushed back his chair and rose to face his guest.

If the man's intonation had surprised him, his appearance amazed him still more. He could have passed for the colonel of a crack cavalry regiment. His bearing was erect and dapper. His dark lounge suit, with the light stripes running through it, was so smartly tailored that one was apt to suspect that he was corseted. His hair was white, his cheeks tanned, his manner cheerful and commanding. He was of less than medium height. With his bristling mustache and pointed imperial he bore a distinct resemblance to Lord Roberts of Kandahar.

Hindwood held out his hand with undisguised relief. "Won't you sit down, sir? I'm afraid I must have seemed discourteous. The truth is, I was expecting some one quite different. The boy didn't announce your name or business."

The stranger accepted his hand with an ironic smile. He did not sit down. Instead he asked a question. "Wouldn't it be wise to shut the door?"

Without waiting for permission, he went to the door and closed it. Before he closed it, he glanced out into the passage. Having regained the middle of the room, he gazed searchingly about him.

"No one here who can listen?"

Again taking matters into his own hands, he made a swift and thorough investigation, peering into the bathroom, stabbing draperies with his cane as with a sword, feeling behind clothes in cupboards. He left no corner uninspected in which an eavesdropper

THE RETURN OF SANTA GORLOF 63

might be secreted. Last of all he approached the window near which Hindwood had dined. For a few seconds he stood there, staring down into the well of blackness and the mysterious fairyland of shifting lights. Laying aside his hat and gloves, but still retaining his cane, he remarked:

"Beautiful! Very beautiful! Exquisite with the witchery of a woman's face, which masks a hidden wickedness!"

Hindwood had been regarding him in silence. "I have yet to learn your name and business," he reminded him.

The stranger chuckled. "My name! I have almost forgotten it. I assume so many. As for my business, I'm a secret service agent in the employ of the British Government."

"Have you credentials?"

"A letter."

He produced from his breast pocket an envelope, containing this message, typed on American Embassy notepaper, "This will serve to introduce the gentleman who is anxious to consult you on the subject of which we spoke this afternoon."

"Satisfactory?"

"Quite. Perhaps now you'll be seated. If you smoke, I can recommend these cigars."

Again the stranger, with unruffled urbanity, betrayed his alert independence. "If you have no objection, I prefer my own."

"As you like." Hindwood was determined to conduct the interview along the lines of social polite-

ness. Selecting a cigar himself, he notched the end. "I'm entirely at your disposal. There's little I can tell. I suppose the subject on which you're anxious to consult me is what happened on the *Ryndam*?"

"Yes and no." The stranger puffed leisurely for a few moments. "The answer is yes, if by 'what happened on the *Ryndam*,' you mean Santa Gorlof."

III

"Santa Gorlof?" Hindwood feigned surprise. "A very charming lady!"

The shrewd face puckered in a smile. The gray eyes grew piercing beneath the beetling, white brows. "So I've been given to understand. She has a way with the men, has our Santa. Even Prince Rogovich, old hand that he was, fell for her. I believe that's your expressive phrase in America. He fell for her in every sense, especially when she pushed him overboard."

Hindwood frowned. He realized that a cat-and-mouse game had commenced, in which he had been allotted the rôle of mouse. He resented the levity with which Santa's name had been mentioned. If the man was in earnest, the matter was too terrible for jest. Though he had harbored the same suspicion, to hear it stated as a fact appalled him. The charge sounded dastardly, spoken in that pleasant voice by this courtly English gentleman who was old enough to be her father.

THE RETURN OF SANTA GORLOF 65

With an effort he kept command of his composure. "Of course you're joking?"

"Not in the least."

"Then, in plain American, you're accusing a beautiful and fascinating woman of murder."

"Of what else?"

Hindwood shrugged his shoulders. "Pardon my density. I didn't catch on. It was your appearance misled me; you look so much a gentleman."

"I flatter myself that there are occasions when I am."

"Then I guess we'll have to reckon this occasion an exception. I might remind you that it's a woman you're accusing and that the penalty for murder is death. Scarcely a subject to make merry over with a play upon words!"

"And you're reminding me," the stranger added gently, "that, if she's a woman, you and I are men. You're trying to tell me that, if my supposition is correct, then all that ravishing caprice that we know as Santa Gorlof will have to be ruthlessly blotted out. Possibly you're picturing, as so many of her victims have pictured before you, the wealth of happiness that might be yours if you could win her for yourself."

Hindwood's hand trembled as he flicked his ash. "My dear sir," he drawled, "I'm not twenty. I'm a hard-bitten man of the world. You credit me with too much romance. In your profession you're trained to spin theories. Please leave me out; stick to your assertion. You come to me, accusing a

woman of my acquaintance—I can hardly call her a friend—of having committed murder. The charge sounds preposterous. Why you should come to me at all I can not guess. Before we go further, I have a right to ask a question: is this mere conjecture or can you prove it?”

“I can prove it.” The stranger paused, studying the despair his words had caused. “I can prove it.” Then he added, “If you’ll help.”

“If I’ll perjure myself.” Scowling, Hindwood leaped to his feet. “That was what you meant. At your time of life I should have thought you could have found a less infamous way of gaining your livelihood. There’s your hat, and there’s the door.”

The mocking old gentleman went through the dumb show of clapping his applause. He settled himself more deeply in his chair. When he spoke, it was with the lazy good-humor of a man at his club. “You fill me with admiration. Your last attitude was superb. I have only one criticism to offer of your play-acting; by letting your cigar go out, you betrayed the perturbation you were trying to disguise. It’s been dead three minutes.” He raised his hand, delaying interruption. “Don’t be angry. I’m not doubting your momentary sincerity. But think back and then own that you also have suspected that she’s guilty.”

“Never.”

“Humph! Your memory must be faulty. Allow me to prompt you with a few facts.”

Then and there, without hesitation or boasting,

THE RETURN OF SANTA GORLOF 67

he detailed to Hindwood all his actions, from his departure from the *Ryndam* to the moment when he had arrived at the Embassy. Hindwood listened to the narration dumfounded.

"So you see," he concluded, "if I can tell you so much as this, there is probably much more that I could tell. You've been infatuated by a she-wolf. What she did to Prince Rogovich, she has done to at least a dozen of her admirers. She would have done the same to you. Because there have been moments when you thought you loved her, you're unwilling to hand her over to justice. You're even willing to risk your own good name in her defense. It's sportsmanly of you, but she's undeserving of your loyalty. When you know the truth, you'll thank your lucky stars that I came to-night."

IV

Hindwood's face had gone ashen—not through fear for his own safety, but for hers. He was determined not to believe a word of what he had heard, and yet he was curious to learn. There was such an air of complete conviction about the stranger; it was impossible to doubt the integrity of his intentions. What he hoped was to discover some flaw in his logic. Sinking back into his chair, he stared in silence at the man who believed he knew everything.

Remembering that his cigar had gone out, he com-

menced searching through his pockets for a match.

"They're at your elbow," the stranger informed him. "No, not there. On the table. I've upset you more than I intended."

Again they lapsed into silence.

At last Hindwood said: "I owe you an apology. I've been insulting, but the blame is partly yours. You didn't explain yourself; you withheld your identity. I was expecting a kind of policeman. But I think you understand. Anyhow, I regret my rudeness. Now tell me, who are you?"

"I'm Major Cleasby, formerly of the Indian Army. My main hobby is studying the Asiatic."

Hindwood looked up sharply. He remembered the impression Santa had made on him, that if her eyes had been darker, she could have passed for a Hindoo princess.

"I don't see what studying the Asiatic has to do with the disappearance of Prince Rogovich," he said. "If we're going to arrive anywhere, what we need is frankness. I think you ought to understand my side of the affair."

The Major nodded.

"Then, to start with, I'm unmarried—not that I'm a woman-hater, but my life has been too packed with important undertakings to leave me much time to spare on women. I've been a kind of express, stopping only at cities and rushing by all the villages. On the *Ryndam* I was forced to come to rest; it so happened that Santa Gorlof was the village at which I halted. The *Ryndam*, as you know, isn't

THE RETURN OF SANTA GORLOF 69

one of these floating palaces; she doesn't attract the flashy type of traveler. The company on this last voyage was dull—dull to the point of tears. The Prince and Santa Gorlof were the two exceptions. I got to know her first and the Prince later. It was I who introduced her to him. We were each of us a bit stand-offish at first; we drifted together against our wills, in an attempt to escape from boredom. Then we began to expect each other, till finally—We were two men and a woman, with nothing to distract us; it's an old story—the usual thing happened. I suppose you'd call it a three-cornered flirtation in which the Prince and I were rivals.

“At first Santa was strictly impartial; toward the end it was the Prince she favored. I'm afraid I got huffy, which was distinctly childish, for none of us was serious. We were two men and a beautiful woman at loose ends, rather dangerously amusing ourselves. At Plymouth, if things had terminated normally, we should have come to our senses and gone our separate ways. At most we should have said good-by on reaching London. In none of our dealings had there been the least hint of anything serious—nothing that would suggest a love-affair. Speaking for myself, my interest in Santa had been on the wane for several days before we landed. I should have parted with her on the dock without compunction, if this extraordinary disappearance hadn't occurred. It was that that again drew us together. Neither of us was willing to believe the worst; we both tried to persuade ourselves that he'd

THE RETURN OF SANTA GORLOF 71

down into the pool of blackness, along whose floor, like the phosphorescence of fishes, lights drifted and darted. The sight of so much coolness quieted him. When he turned, the Major had not moved a muscle; he was sitting as he had left him, erect and palely smiling.

"You'll not be surprised when I tell you, Major Cleasby, that your last piece of information completely overwhelms me. You come to me in the rôle of a secret service agent, and now you claim to be her husband."

"I'm both."

"Do you mean me to understand that you're accumulating the evidence that will convict your wife?"

"Convict her and, I regret to say, hang her. Stated baldly, that is my purpose."

Hindwood perched himself on the window ledge and regarded his guest intently. He didn't look a monster; he looked in all respects a kindly, well-bred gentleman, and yet, if what he had just heard was correct, there were few monsters in history who could compare with him. Hindwood tried to picture him as Santa's husband. He couldn't. He was thankful that he couldn't. For a reason which he did not distress himself to analyze, he didn't wish to believe that she had ever had a husband. As for the hints about her criminal record and her many lovers, he utterly rejected them. Was it likely that a woman so royal and aloof could have stooped to the gutter? But if these accusations were not true, what was their object? Either it was a case of

mistaken identity and there were two Santa Gorlofs, or the object was to infuriate him with jealousy so that he would blurt out all he knew.

He eyed the Major doubtfully. He wasn't insane. He didn't look a rascal. And yet, what husband in his senses——? He began to notice details. The Major was less old than he had fancied at first; he was more worn than aged. Illness or tragedy might have whitened him. It was even possible that he had made himself up for the part he was playing. His eyes were clear, and his hands virile. With the mustache and imperial removed——

“Major Cleasby, you ask me to accept a great deal on your bare word,” he said politely. “You come to me with nothing to introduce you but the most briefly formal letter. The moment you enter my room, before you'll have anything to do with me, you inspect every hiding-place as though I were a counterfeiter or an anarchist. You boldly announce to me that ever since I landed in England you've had me followed and observed. You use the results of your spying as a kind of blackmail to induce me to present you with the sort of evidence for which you're searching. You trick me into telling you about a shipboard flirtation with a woman whom you say you want convicted of murder. No sooner have I told you, than you declare that you yourself are married to her. I ought to refuse to allow this interview to go further without calling in a lawyer. I don't mean to be offensive, but your kaleidoscopic changes put a strain on my credulity. I can't believe

THE RETURN OF SANTA GORLOF 73

your story that you're a secret service agent endeavoring to get your wife executed. When men tire of matrimony, they find less ingenious methods of recovering their bachelorhood."

The Major smiled with his patient air of affability. "It isn't my bachelorhood that I'm trying to recover. It's my——"

"If you don't mind," Hindwood cut in, "I'd like to finish my say first. One of the things that you may not have learned is that I'm here on a mission of international dimensions. It concerns more than one of the governments of Europe. I can't afford to have my name mixed up in a scandal and, what's more, I can bring influences to bear to prevent it from being introduced. You may be anything you like; whatever you are cuts no ice. I'm through with you and with whatever you may imagine took place on the *Ryndam*. You seem to think that I'm concealing a guilty knowledge that would enable you to bring this Gorlof woman to trial. You're on the wrong tack. I have no such knowledge. The longer you stay here, the more you waste my time."

The Major was on the point of answering when the telephone rang shrilly. Grateful for a diversion, Hindwood crossed the room. As he unhooked the receiver, he glanced across his shoulder, "Excuse me."

"Is this Mr. Hindwood?"

"It is."

It was the hotel operator asking.

"There's a call for you, sir. It's from some one who's not on a newspaper. Will you take it?"

"Certainly."

There was a pause while the connection was being made; then a foreign voice, a woman's, questioned, "Eees thees Meester Hindwood? Eef you please, one meenute. A lady wants to talk wiz you."

Coming across the distance, subdued and earnest, he caught the tones of a voice which was instantly familiar.

"Don't be startled. Don't answer me. There's a man with you. Tell him nothing. If you ever loved me, even for a second, don't believe a word he says."

She had not been arrested! A wave of joy swept over him. The uncertainty as to whether she was arrested had been crushing him.

He waited, hoping she would speak again.

Shattering the spell with a touch of bathos, the operator inquired, "Number?"

With that he rang off. As he raised his head, he had the uncomfortable sensation that the Major had turned away from watching him.

VI

"So you want to be rid of me!" The Major glanced across his shoulder, at the same time making no effort to remove himself.

Hindwood crossed the room thoughtfully and

THE RETURN OF SANTA GORLOF 75

seated himself. "I've made no secret of it from the moment you entered."

The Major laughed genially. "I don't blame you. You think I'm a wronged husband trying to get even, or else an unscrupulous detective baiting traps with falsehoods. The situation's unpleasant—for you, especially."

"I'm glad you realize it."

"I assure you I do. You've given yourself away completely."

"You think so?"

"I don't think; I know. What you've told me proves beyond a doubt that you're possessed of exactly the knowledge that would bring Santa Gorlof to trial."

"You're imaginative."

"I'm observant. You're wondering what makes me so certain. The explanation's simple: I've studied Santa's tactics. Her strategy's the same in every instance. When a man suspects her guilt, she does what she did to you: seals his mouth with kisses."

"This is too much." Hindwood brought his fist down with a bang. "Do you go or do I have to force you?"

"This time I'll try one of yours."

With astounding assurance the Major helped himself to one of Hindwood's cigars, which he had previously rejected. Without bravado he lighted it and, having ascertained that it was drawing, continued: "If you used force, you'd regret it. You'd

make certain of the unwelcome publicity you're so anxious to avoid; you'd miss a stranger story than any Arabian tale that ever was concocted. You think you can still touch bottom; as a matter of fact you're already out of sight of land. You sit there looking an average, successful American; actually you've become an heroic figure, adrift upon an ocean so romantic and uncharted that it beats upon the cliffs of every human passion."

Hindwood shifted uneasily. "So you're a fortune-teller in addition to being an ill-used husband and a detective!"

Ignoring his sarcasm, the Major proceeded: "Some time ago you accused me of ingenuity in the means I had adopted to recover my bachelorhood. It's not my bachelorhood, but my own and my country's honor that, with your help, I'm endeavoring to recover. That sounds extravagant? But consider—what motive could be sufficiently extravagant to compel a man to bend all his energies toward bringing the woman whom he loves to the scaffold? Because I say it calmly, you doubt that I love her. What man could help loving her? She's the last of a long line of false, fair women who've stirred up madness and left behind a trail of ruin."

Rising wearily, Hindwood turned his back and commenced fingering the documents on his desk. "There'll be nothing gained by carrying this discussion further."

With a question the Major recaptured his atten-

THE RETURN OF SANTA GORLOF 77

tion. "Did it ever strike you that she's partly Asiatic?"

Hindwood swung round, surprised into truth. "What makes you ask it?"

VII

"Even to myself," the Major sighed, "the story which I am about to tell sounds incredible. My reason for confiding it to a stranger is that, when you have heard it, you may dispense with chivalry and become stern enough to do your duty. To protect a woman, whatever her age or looks, is an instinct as primitive as religion. When she happens to be beautiful and the object of your affection, not to protect her is a kind of blasphemy. You and I, though you deny it, are both in love with Santa. I am her husband, while you are no more than her chance-met admirer. Yet you, in her hour of danger, are prepared to shield her with your honor, whereas I am among the most relentless of her pursuers.

"The best part of my life has been spent in India. I went there with my regiment when I was little more than a boy. The fascination of an ancient civilization took possession of my imagination. I became a student of it and soon acquired a knowledge of native habits which was more fitting to a secret agent than to a soldier. I learned to speak many dialects and could pass myself off as an Asiatic with the



minimum amount of disguise. Instead of frequenting clubs and idling away my leisure in the usual round of social futilities which make up the average Anglo-Indian's life, I formed the practice of slipping out into the night and losing my identity in the teeming, Oriental shadow-world by which I was surrounded.

“On one of my wanderings—when or where it is not necessary to particularize—I strolled into a temple and saw a young girl dancing. As perhaps you know, girls are dedicated to the worship of certain gods and goddesses at a very early age. They are for the most part deities who symbolize fecundity; the ritual with which they are celebrated is gross. The temple girls are chosen for their beauty and are trained by the priesthood to perform sensual dances, which are as old as time. They are not nuns or priestesses; their social status, if they may be said to have any in a land where woman is at best a plaything, approximates to that of temple slaves. They are taken from their parents at an age when sahibs' children are in nurseries. From the moment they are dedicated, their minds and souls are left to stagnate; they are treated like performing animals—fed and drilled and degraded that they may employ their bodies with the utmost grace.

“This girl, the moment I saw her, impressed me as being the most fascinating human creature I had ever set eyes on. I had pressed in with the crowd from the evil-smelling, moonlit street. The temple was dim with the smoke of swaying censers. Its

THE RETURN OF SANTA GORLOF 79

walls seemed vast with the flash of gold and jewels. At the far end, scarcely discernible, a huge god squatted, gloating and sinister. From somewhere in the shadows, swelling into frenzy, came the pounding of drums and the clash of barbaric music. Across the open pavement, between the god and the spectators, a chain of girls coiled and twisted like a snake.

“At the time I entered, the dance was nearly ended. It had evidently been going on for a long while. One by one the girls were slipping down exhausted. There they lay disordered, with their hair twined about them and their slim, bronze bodies twitching.

“But one girl danced on, ever quickening her pace, till she alone remained. She was like a streak of flame, a will-o'-the-wisp, a spring petal blown before the wind: she seemed the symbol of everything that is young and pagan. Her childish face was masked in an unchanging smile. Her lips were parted; her body gleamed golden among the muted lights. She stooped and darted like a lizard across her fallen comrades; with one leap she floated through the air, perched for a moment on the knees of the god, and vanished into his bosom. Instantly the censers were extinguished, and I was carried out into the evil-smelling street by the rush of the perspiring crowd.

“From that night it was as though I were bewitched. There was never an hour when that drifting blossom of a girl was absent from my mind. I idealized her into a nobility that was more than

earthly. I flung aside all sense of caste and race. I forgot that I was a sahib and over thirty, whereas she was a dancing girl and little more than a child. I excused my infatuation on the ground of magnanimity, telling myself that if I could possess her, I could save her from certain degradation. Above all, I wanted to wipe out her houri's smile and to cause the soul to appear in her eyes. Every hour that I could spare, I disguised myself as a native and haunted the temple. At rare intervals I caught glimpses of her. And so six months went by.

"Gradually my desire strengthened into determination. I was insane with chivalry—utterly quixotic, as quixotic as you are now. I had raised her to such a pinnacle of worship that a liaison was not to be contemplated. What I planned was to carry her off and marry her. When you remember the gulf which the Anglo-Indian places between himself and the races he governs, you can estimate the measure of my madness. Such an act would entail resigning from my regiment and inviting social ostracism on every hand. It meant ruin, but to my impassioned mind no price seemed too high to pay.

"There was an old priest who, unknown to me, had observed my comings and goings. One evening he addressed me by name. While I was hesitating as to what could be his motive, he volunteered to obtain the girl for me if I would reward him with a sufficient bribe.

"Three nights later, as I waited, a door in the temple wall opened, and a muffled figure emerged. With-

THE RETURN OF SANTA GORLOF 81

out a word, obeying the instructions I had received, I turned away, and she followed. Through the sleeping city we crept, like a pair of shadows.

"In the European quarter I had secretly rented a bungalow which had long been deserted. It stood in a wilderness of overgrown shrubberies; a high wall went about it. Not until the rusty gate had closed behind us did I dare to acknowledge her presence; then, taking her in my arms, I carried her up the path to the unlighted house. We entered. There were just the two of us; I had not risked engaging servants. In the darkness I set her down and lighted a lamp. As the flame quickened and I knelt beside her, she uncovered her face. So far, I had seen her only distantly. It was the moment for which I had waited. Her face was white."

The Major passed his hand across his forehead. His lips tightened. He betrayed every sign of a man doing his best to conceal an overpowering emotion. He leaned back and gazed up at the ceiling, blowing out a cloud of smoke. When he had watched it disperse, he turned to Hindwood with a deprecating smile.

"I hope I don't bore you. I'll omit the ardors and ecstasies of my love-affair and stick to the bare outline. What I discovered was that she was an Eurasian. She was fourteen years of age—a woman by Indian standards, but still a child by ours. Her eyes were gray, and her complexion was so light that, with any one but an expert, she could have passed for a European. There are millions of dark-

haired women with her coloring to be found in any Latin country. Given the proper manners and a European setting, scarcely a soul would have suspected her. Certainly no one would dare to voice his suspicions who met her as my wife.

“Her history I pieced together from many conversations. Her father had been a tea-planter—an Englishman of good family. Her mother had been a Burmese. They both had died in a cholera epidemic; their half-caste child had been picked up from the highways and placed in the temple.

“Seeing that I was out to be chivalrous, I made up my mind to do the thing thoroughly. I hurried up a furlough that was due me and, taking her to France, placed her in a convent. My reason for choosing France was that, when she became my wife, there would be fewer chances of discovery if she passed as French instead of English. In the south, especially in Provence, there are many women of her type descended from the Saracens. If you’ve been to Arles, you must have noticed them. At the end of three years, when she was seventeen, I returned, married her, and took her back to India. If any one detected the deception, no one was bold enough to proclaim it. Every circumstance argued against such a surmise. She had forgotten much of the English she had known, and pretended to speak only French. I had coached her in her part; she acted it to perfection. By no hint or sign did she let the knowledge escape her that she could understand a word of any native dialect. So far as I am aware,

THE RETURN OF SANTA GORLOF 83

she was accepted at her face value, as a young Provençal whom I had courted in her own country.

“For some time my romantic folly brought us nothing but happiness. We invented a legend to account for her family, which, through continual repetition, we almost came to believe ourselves. No two people were ever more in love. Despite our difference in age and the racial gulf which divided us, no man and woman ever seemed more wisely mated. Apparently whatever shameful knowledge she had acquired in the temple had been blotted out by her superimposed refinement. Even to me she betrayed no hint of grossness; she appeared to be as sweet and innocent as the girl I claimed her to be—the girl I said I had surprised in the passionless tranquility of a French convent.

“Her devotion to myself was pathetic—it verged on adoration. She was continually contriving new ways of rewarding me for the horrors from which I had saved her. To me the ground she trod was sacred. I delighted in making myself her slave. We competed with each other in generosity. With each of us the other’s slightest whim was law. She was unbelievably beautiful, the most mysteriously beautiful woman in India. I was more than twice her years and the envy of every man who saw her. Her beauty seemed only the outshining of her goodness. Save for an accident, I should never have known otherwise.

“We had been married two years when she bore me a child. Our dread, when we knew that she was

to become a mother, was that our offspring might reveal the Asiatic strain. We took every precaution to hide the fact, if this should happen. But even this was spared us. Our boy was blue-eyed and flaxen-haired as any Anglo-Saxon. She worshiped him. He seemed to symbolize Heaven's blessing on the lie we practiced. He was never out of her sight. In her fear lest he might develop some native characteristic, she refused to have an *ayah* and cared for him entirely. Wherever she went, she kept him with her; he slept in our room at night. So perfectly had she drilled herself that, up to this point, I can not recall an instance in which she had fallen below the level of a well-born white woman. It was the finest instinct in her nature that proved her undoing—her mother-love that trapped her into the self-revelation which produced our tragedy.

“Our child was a sturdy little fellow of nearly two, just beginning to run about, when suddenly he died. We had a house-party at the time. His mother was playing tennis. While she was playing, he was strangled and thrown down a well by a native servant who believed he had been slighted. My wife, missing the child, went in search of him in panic and caught the native in the act of getting rid of the body. Instantly she reverted to what her mother had been before her. Snatching the man's knife, she killed him before any of her guests could restrain her. In the abandonment of her grief, she became an out and out Burmese woman, scattering dust on her hair, beating her breasts, and rending

her clothes with the wildest lamentations. The fiction of her French origin was utterly destroyed. There was no longer any doubt among those who witnessed her that I was married to an Eurasian.

“Our position at once became intolerable. A half-caste is despised the world over, but in India especially. That night every servant left. None of our friends came near us. We sat alone with our grief in a deserted house. As her calmness returned, she grew tragically contrite—not contrite from any moral sense, but because she had given away our secret. She seemed incapable of appreciating that she had done any wrong in depriving justice of its victim. When I tried to explain to her that she had committed a crime, she shook her head impatiently, insisting that she had done what any mother ought to do under the circumstances. When I pressed the subject she became persuaded that I, too, was blaming her, and then that I had never properly loved either her or her child. And yet I think I never loved her more tenderly than at that moment.

“A week later, after miserable days and nights of suspense, we received our sentence. Native sedition was running high. The Government did not dare to bring the wife of a British officer to trial. Such a course would have proved too damaging to the prestige of Anglo-Indian officialdom. I was promised that the scandal would be hushed up and I should be given a new employment, if I would agree to ship her out of India at once and to see to it that she never returned. What it amounted to for me was

perpetual separation and for her perpetual banishment.

“I have often tried to arrive at a sane conclusion as to how far I am the author of what she has become. Had I shared her banishment there can be little doubt that her white blood would have kept control of her poisoned heritage. Unfortunately I had a living to earn. Professionally I was broken. My savings were inconsiderable. I had her to maintain. I was past mid-life and by leaving India would have sacrificed the pension that was already in sight. Moreover, I knew of no way of marketing my training in any country outside India. So I played safe and bowed to authority. I resigned from my regiment and was transferred to the department of military intelligence. After knowing the security of a home and wife, at past forty I became a secret agent, a spy and a wanderer, a friendless and unfriendly man, unsociable and socially unacceptable. As for my wife, aged only twenty-one, she was exiled to England, a stranger in a gray, chill country, bankrupt in her happiness, with no one to defend her, taking with her the temptation of her unusual beauty and the treacherous inheritance of her intermingled blood.

“There seemed no justice in the world for either of us. The offending cause of our punishment was the protective motherhood which had prompted her to slay the killer of our child. But, to use your terse Americanism, we were ‘up against’ blind angers and racial prejudices, which no amount of bucking on

THE RETURN OF SANTA GORLOF 87

our part could change. So far as she was concerned, even before her life had started, she had been condemned. The initial sin had been her parents' when they had allowed themselves to create her. Before she had seen daylight, the uncharity of mankind had proclaimed her a half-caste and a pariah. From her inherited fate I had tried to snatch her when I had bought her from the temple. You may say that my recklessness was nothing more than selfishness, pharisaically parading as chivalry; in allowing her to bear me a child, I had only reduplicated the crime of her parents. Nevertheless, I had tried to rescue her and could have succeeded, had not her mother-love ensnared her. She was betrayed by the purest instinct in her nature; she was shown no more leniency than if it had been the basest. There lay the cruelty that rankled. She was judged not by motives, but by results. She would have been pardoned and applauded, had she been a full-blooded white woman.

“In spite of all these accumulated injustices, I believe she would have retained the strength to go straight had there been any limit to our separation. There was none. For all the comfort that I could be to her, I might just as well have been dead or divorced from her. I was all that remained out of the ruin that had overtaken her, yet the most to which she could look forward, save for brief meetings at long intervals, was that I would be restored to her in my useless old age, when the glorious flood-

tide of her youth had receded. You see I am sufficiently unbiased to be able to plead her case."

The Major rose and, going over to the window, stood with his back toward Hindwood, gazing out into the night. Some minutes had elapsed, when he turned quietly.

"Where had I got to? Ah, yes! To where I had to send her to England! I accompanied her to Calcutta to see her safely on the liner. Shall I ever forget that journey? It had the gloom of a funeral and the frenzy of an elopement. Actually my rôle was that of a policeman deporting a miscreant who happened to be his wife. We tried to pack into moments the emotions of a lifetime. As background to our love-making was the poignant memory of the puzzled child, whom seven years earlier I had escorted on the same journey, *en route* for France, where she was to be made over into a sahib's lady. In her wondering attitude toward the fortunes that assailed her, she was little changed. She was still startlingly unsophisticated—a child-woman, dangerously credulous and deceptively unversed in masculine wiles. I had taught her to be so dependent that I dared not imagine how she would do without me. She was so artless. She took such pleasure in admiration. Love was so necessary to her; it was the breath of her life. Its misuse had been the breath and the means of life of her Burmese mother before her.

"Her complete lack of comprehension that I in any way shared her sacrifice formed the most dis-

troubling part of my ordeal. She assumed that she was being exiled by my choice. She persisted in talking as if she could stay, if I would only change my mind. Though she did not accuse me in words, she believed that I was ridding myself of her because she had disgraced me—that I was pushing her across the horizon, where she would be forgotten and out of sight. Up to the last moment she pleaded with and coaxed me, as though it were I who was refusing to repeal her sentence. The ship cast off, bearing her from me with her broken heart and her embittered memories of the newly-dug grave, while I turned back to ferret through the gutters of Asia, that I might earn the wherewithal to provide for her.

“At first she wrote many times a day; then every day; then regularly to catch each outgoing mail. In the whole of England she knew nobody. In her anger against British justice she wished to know nobody. She was inconsolable, bruised in spirit, and crushed in her pride. After the pomp and hubbub of the East, she found London drab and melancholy. From her lodgings in Kensington she poured out her soul on paper. Much of what she wrote consisted of memories, the tender trifles which a mother treasures about her child.

“Gradually, almost imperceptibly, there came a change. A querulous note crept in, a questioning of motives. Why had I sent her as far away as England? Why had I sent her away at all? If it were true that it was not I who had exiled her, why

had I not accompanied her? Was it because I was tired and ashamed of her? It would have been kinder to have left her to dance in the temple. Then a new suspicion grew up, which betrayed an evil that I had never traced in her. With whom was I living? Some white woman? Was that why I had rid myself of her?

“What answers could I make? It was like arguing with a spiteful child. Our misunderstandings were as wide as the distance that separated us. She implored and finally demanded that I should join her. The more I stated obstacles, the more convinced she became that I was cruel, like all the sahibs who were torturing her—the proud sahibs who thought nothing of a murdered baby, when it was only the child of a half-caste woman.

“From then on her heart hardened, till at last I failed to recognize in her any resemblance to the gentle wife who had been so much my companion. She wrote vaguely about revenge, a revenge that should embrace the whole white race. Contempt should be repaid with despising, hatred with blows, blood with blood. Her beauty should be the weapon. She seemed to have gone mad. Suddenly her letters ceased. My remittances were returned; they had failed to reach her.

“For what follows I have but one explanation. By some species of unconscious hypnotism, so long as I had exerted physical influence over her, I had had the power to make the European in her predominate. As my influence weakened with time and distance, she

THE RETURN OF SANTA GORLOF 91

relapsed into the woman she always would have been, if I had not found her: a smiling menace to the nobilities of both the races from which she was descended, a human jackal following the hunt. That sounds harsh? Then listen to the conclusion of my story.

“One day, six months after I had lost touch with her, I was glancing through an illustrated weekly when, on turning a page, I found her portrait gazing up at me. She was photographed in almost the attitude and attire in which I had first caught sight of her in the temple. The very setting was similar; behind her the huge god squatted, gloating and sinister—on her face was the unchanging houri’s smile. On reading the text I discovered that she had leaped into instant fame as an exponent of Indian dancing. You will remember that in the last two years before the war the dance craze was at its height. She had been acclaimed a great artist; everything she said, did, and wore was fulsomely praised and described. There was no false reticence about either her or her admirers; she was frankly advertised as being possessed of the most beautiful body in Europe. She had given herself a French name and was announced as being of French ancestry. According to her printed biography, her father had been an orchid-hunter who had taken her with him on all his expeditions. On his last, in India, he had died; she had been kidnaped for her beauty and sold into the service of a Hindoo temple. From this bondage she had been rescued by an Englishman of title who had chivalrously restored her to her family in Mar-

seilles. There was much more to the same effect—a jumble of perverted truth and romantic lies, precisely the kind of adventurous nonsense which appeals to the sensation-seeking public.

“From then on, *via* the press, I was always getting news of her. London, Paris, Berlin, St. Petersburg, each in turn went mad over her. She captivated a continent. Kings and emperors commanded her to appear before them. Her tours were royal triumphs. Little by little ugly rumors began to spread. There was a Parisian banker who, when he had lavished his all upon her, committed suicide, leaving his wife and children penniless. There was another scandal; it had to do with a Russian general who had betrayed his country. At his court-martial he poisoned himself when her name was introduced into the evidence. As though a conspiracy of silence had broken down, now that she began to be gossiped about, scandals gathered thick and fast. Each new one was more infamous than the last; out of each she emerged unpitying and smiling. It was only her victims who suffered. Her progress was marked by a trail of death and ruin. Nevertheless, infatuated by the exquisiteness of her body, men fluttered about her unceasingly, like moths, shriveling their souls in the flame of her fascination. When the peace of the world was violated by the Germans—”

Hindwood leaned forward, tapping the Major's knee. “I can spare you your eloquence. The rest of your story is common property. The woman you describe stole the Allies' anti-submarine defense plans

THE RETURN OF SANTA GORLOF 93

from her lover. He was a British naval officer, temporarily in Paris. She was caught red-handed. There was a sentimental agitation in her favor—an attempt to argue that as a physical masterpiece of feminine perfection she ought to be exempted. It accomplished nothing. She was a German spy, who had sold men's lives for profit. She received and deserved no more mercy than a rag-picker. After having been encouraged in her sins because of her unrivaled loveliness, she was led out at dawn in the woods of Vincennes, where the body which had maddened thousands of eyes was riddled with bullets."

The Major's lips were smiling crookedly. "How could she have been riddled with bullets," he questioned, "when you crossed the Atlantic in her company?"

Hindwood shrugged his shoulders. "If you insist on propounding conundrums, it's up to you to supply the answers."

"I can supply them. The person executed in the woods of Vincennes was not a woman."

"That's a daring assertion. Who was it?"

"A distinguished French officer, a man who had been crippled in defending his country and held the highest awards for gallantry. In pre-war days he had been an old flame of hers, whom she had abandoned with more than her ordinary callousness. On hearing of her predicament, he begged to be allotted the duty of seeing that her sentence was properly executed. The reason he gave was that he might clear himself of the taint of ever having associated

with a traitress. He was put in charge of the guard on her last night. Making use of his opportunity, he exchanged clothing with her and—”

Hindwood stifled a yawn. “You expect me to believe this?”

The Major mastered his anger. “I expect you to believe nothing. I’m here to state facts and to warn you that your friend, who now calls herself Santa Gorlof, is the same woman. My appeal to you for assistance in bringing her to justice is both personal and patriotic. I am her husband; my honor is involved. I am also an Englishman; all her intrigues, even this last, in which Prince Rogovich met his fate, are aimed against the friends of England—one of whom, I may remind you, is your own great nation. All I can say is that each man has his separate standard of loyalty. For me, an old soldier, my devotion to my country is more important than my compassion for an erring woman.”

Hindwood rose. Uncomfortably, against his will, he had been impressed by the stoical dignity of his persistent guest. “You deserve that I should be frank with you. Here’s the truth—I accept very little of what you’ve told me. Either you’ve mistaken my traveling companion for another woman, or else you’ve been trying to prejudice me with a fantastic story. But even though I accepted your supposed revelation, I should refuse to help you. On your own showing, you’re endeavoring to bring the mother of your child to the scaffold. I should respect you more if you left her fate to other hands. Disbelieving you,

THE RETURN OF SANTA GORLOF 95

as I do, I regard the introduction of Miss Gorlof's name into the discussion as rank impertinence. Your coupling of my name with hers increases the cowardice of your discourtesy. If you had convinced me and I were eager to assist you, I couldn't. I know nothing about her—our acquaintance was the most casual. In all probability I've seen her for the last time; I haven't the vaguest notion where she's to be found. If your half-caste vampire actually escaped the bullets in the woods of Vincennes, I advise you to search for her in another direction. You may take my word for it that if Santa Gorlof learns of your activities, you'll find yourself in trouble. I reckon myself some judge when it comes to character."

The Major drew out his silk handkerchief from his breast pocket and flicked a speck of dust from his immaculate white spats. With the utmost deliberation he recovered his hat and gloves. For a few seconds he gazed out of the window thoughtfully; then, turning slowly, he crossed the room. With his hand on the door knob, he glanced back solemnly. He passed his fingers across his lips and cleared his throat. "When she has added you to her list of victims, if she gives you time before she kills you, remember that I warned you."

When Hindwood had recovered sufficiently from his surprise to follow him out into the passage, every sign of his unwelcome visitor had vanished.

He had scarcely closed the door and reseated himself, when again there came a tapping.

CHAPTER THE THIRD

HE PLUNGES INTO ROMANCE

I

HINDWOOD consulted his watch; the hour was nearing midnight. He was surprised to discover how the time had flown. The tapping outside his door continued. There was nothing hurried about it, nothing impatient. On the other hand, there was nothing humble. It was a secret, intimate kind of tapping, like the signaling of a woman to her lover. It would cease for a minute, so that he began to hope that he was to be left in quiet; then it would recommence.

He sat obstinately at bay, almost holding his breath, not daring to move lest he should betray that he had noticed. He was determined not to admit this new disturber. He had had enough of danger warnings and revengeful husbands. The only danger that he greatly dreaded was the loss of a second night's rest.

The sound was getting on his nerves. It was so irritatingly discreet and importunate. At first he had tried to believe that his caller was a hotel employee, but a servant would have taken silence for an answer a good five minutes ago. If it had been any one who

HE PLUNGES INTO ROMANCE 97

had a right to be there, the tapping would have been bolder. Whoever it was, it was some one who had correctly estimated his mood.

Tap-a-tap, tap-a-tap. An interval, and then, *tap-a-tap.*

Getting stealthily to his feet, he tiptoed to the threshold and flung wide the door.

"I beg your pardon." He caught her arm as she stumbled back. "I guess I startled you."

"Shish!" She pressed a finger to her lips. "Let me inside, so that I can sit down."

Giving her his arm, he led her to a chair. Having returned and closed the door, he surveyed her at his leisure.

She had the appearance of a peasant woman dressed in her Sunday best, yet so great was her dignity, she did not seem out of place in her surroundings. She was very aged; her figure was shapeless and bowed. Her gray hair was cropped like a boy's; she wore spread over it, knotted at the throat, a neatly folded kerchief of white linen. She was clad in a black gown of the utmost plainness. Nothing distracted attention from her face, which was as stoical with endurance as a gladiator's. You could almost trace the riverbeds her tears had worn. The fist of fate had punched it flat. It was a ruin to which violence had done its worst, but had failed to destroy its gentleness. And he had expected Santa. Instead of feminine frailty, spurring weak desires, there had come this woman, iron of will, broken in body, ravished by years, with her tremen-

dous impression of moral strength. As she sat before him, her gnarled hands resting on her cane, pushing back the weight of her ancient shoulders, she raised to him the dim valiance of her eyes.

"What can I do for you?" he questioned.

"Nothing." She swung her head from side to side with the brooding fierceness of a decrepit lioness. "It is you whom I have come to help."

"I!" he smiled. "I think you are mistaken."

"I am never mistaken." She gazed at him intently. "I have come to help you to act generously. You have it in your power to save a woman, perhaps at the sacrifice of yourself."

He laughed quietly. "You mean Santa Gorlof. I wonder when I'm to hear the last of her. A secret service man has spent the past two hours instructing me what I can do for her. You must have met him. He had scarcely left when you began to tap. He tried to convince me that if I didn't protect myself by giving him information which would lead to her arrest, my name would be added to her list of victims. A pleasant sort of threat! I'm afraid he found me, as you will probably find me, disappointing. I'm not possessed of any incriminating information, and I don't place any faith in her list of victims. She struck me as being a very gracious and fascinating woman. Beyond that I have no opinion about her, either for or against."

The old head sank further forward; the dim eyes became searching. "Then you told him nothing?"

"I knew nothing to tell."

There followed a deep silence, during which they gazed fixedly at each other. She sighed contentedly, nodding her approval. "So you are in love with her! That makes things easier. Even to me you lie—to me who am her friend!"

"I deny that I am in love with her, but what makes you think so?"

"She thinks so."

"Then you come directly from her?"

He had been unable to keep back the eagerness from his voice. Instantly he realized his indiscretion. Pulling up a chair, he seated himself opposite her, that he might lose nothing of her changes of expression.

"You're the second unconventional visitor," he said, "whom I've received this evening. The object of both your visits seems to be the same—to associate my name with that of a lady to whom I am comparatively a stranger. We may have conversed together a couple of dozen times; when we parted, I never expected to hear from her. Within the space of twenty-four hours a man who claims to be her husband comes to me accusing her of every infamy. No sooner has the door closed behind him than you enter, asserting that I am in love with her. You must pardon me if I begin to suspect a plot. For all I know, you may be my first visitor's accomplice, employing a more disarming method to get me to commit myself. You tell me you are Santa Gorlof's friend; you might equally well say you are her grandmother—you offer me no proof. If she's really in trouble, I'm

sorry. But I fail to see any way in which I can serve her."

"If there were no way, I should not have troubled you, especially at this late hour. As for her being in danger, she has always been in danger. She was born into the world like that. I am old—very old. I have no traces of it left, but I, too, was once beautiful."

The trembling hands fumbled at the white linen kerchief, loosening the knot against her neck. "Ah, yes, I was beautiful. But I did not come to you to speak of that. My friend, you are good; I saw that the moment I entered. I said to myself, 'There is the man who could understand our Santa and make her honorable like himself.' The world has given her no chance—no, never. The husband who should have cared for her tossed her aside like an old shoe when, like all animals robbed of their young, she struck out in self-defense. I see you have heard that—how her child was murdered and she was sent into exile for taking justice into her own hands. Doubtless you have heard much else. She is a woman who would have done no harm to any one if she had been allowed to remain a mother. But because they scoffed at her motherhood, all her goodness has turned to wickedness. Using her body as a decoy, she has slain men of the race that persecuted her. Because she could not get her child back, she has become an outlaw, making society pay for her loneliness."

She paused, watching her effect.

HE PLUNGES INTO ROMANCE 101

Hindwood had not removed his eyes from hers. His face was troubled. "I don't think you know what has been told me. The man who introduced himself to me as her husband said that she was a half-caste, a temple dancing-girl, who to revenge herself had poisoned white men's happiness and during the war had become an international spy, working against the Allies. He made the assertion that she was responsible for the vanishing of Prince Rogovich. If these things are so, how can I, a decent, self-respecting man—"

Bending forward, the old lady clutched his hand. "It was decent, self-respecting men who made her what she is to-day."

He released his hand quietly. "You have not denied any of the accusations which are brought against her. And yet, remembering her face, I can not believe that she is bad. You want me to save her. If by that you mean that you want me to pledge myself not to give evidence against her, you may tell her from me that I have no evidence."

"I don't mean that."

"Then what?"

"I want you to declare to me that you love her. No, listen. There is still something in her that is pure. You have made her conscious of it. You can undo the wrong that has been done her and make her the woman she should be, if you choose."

Hindwood rose from his seat and paced the room. Suddenly he halted and swung round. "How did you know that I desired her? Until you came, I

scarcely realized it myself. Why should you have appointed yourself to tempt me—you, who are so old? Between sane people, what would be the use of my telling you that I loved her? Though I refused to believe any of the libels against her which even you seem to credit, there are two facts which it does not seem possible to escape: that she is married and that the police are on her track. I have been warned that when she traps men, she commences by appealing to their chivalry. That's what's happening now. Do you see where you place me? If she is falsely accused, I brand myself a coward by running away from her. If she is guilty, I endanger my good name by having any more to do with her. What I am waiting to hear you say is that this is a case of mistaken identity—that she is willing and able to prove it."

"Will you help me out of my chair?"

When she was on her feet, she let go his arm and commenced to move across the room.

"Where are you going?"

"To give her your message."

"I've told you nothing."

"You've told me that you love her."

She was on the point of leaving. With quiet decision he put his back against the door, preventing her from opening it.

"Madam," he said, "old as you are, you owe me some consideration. Before you go, I at least have a right to ask your name."

She smiled wistfully. The harshness in her face

HE PLUNGES INTO ROMANCE 103

was replaced by a glow of tenderness. "Yes, you have the right. I am called 'the Little Grandmother.' I am a readjuster of destinies—the champion of the down-trodden. I fight for those for whom the world has ceased to care."

"But what have you to do with Santa?"

"She has been oppressed."

"And because she has been oppressed, you overlook any crimes she may have committed?"

"I am not God, that I should judge. If people's hearts are empty, I reckon them my children."

"Let me ask you one more question. Did Santa tell you that she loved me?"

The old head shook sorrowfully. "To act nobly it is not necessary to be loved in return. Let me go. Do not try to follow me."

Standing aside, he opened the door. "And we meet again?"

As she hobbled out, she glanced across her shoulder. In her gesture there was the ghostly grace of the proud coquette who was vanishing and forgotten. "Will you want to," she whispered, "to-morrow?"

II

Now that she was gone he realized that under the hypnotic influence of her presence he had revealed far more than he had intended. He should never have allowed her to escape him. He should have in-

sisted on accompanying her. She had afforded him his only clue to Santa's whereabouts.

At all costs he must see Santa. His peace of mind depended on it. The thought of her would haunt him. He would never rest until he had arrived at the truth. Probably, until he had seen her, he would never be free from the mischief-making intrusions of anonymous intriguers. He dodged the theory of her guilt, preferring to persuade himself that a conspiracy was afoot, the object of which might be blackmail. More likely it was a clever move on the part of financial rivals to thwart his plans by discrediting him. If he could meet Santa, he would know for certain whether she was a decoy or a fellow-victim. Whatever his intellect might suspect, his heart resolutely acquitted her.

It was too late to overtake the Little Grandmother, but he was determined to do his best to trace her. In the passage he discovered a solitary individual collecting boots and shoes, which had been placed for cleaning outside the neighboring doors.

"An old lady left my room a few moments ago. She had short hair and a white handkerchief tied over her head. No doubt you saw her."

The man rose from his stooping posture. "An old lady with short hair! You say she had a handkerchief tied over it? It doesn't sound like the Ritz. No, I did not see her."

Of the man at the elevator he made the same inquiry, only to be informed that several old ladies had been carried up and down.

HE PLUNGES INTO ROMANCE 105

Descending to the foyer, he presented himself at the desk.

"Isn't it your rule to have all callers announced before they're shown in on your guests?"

"Most decidedly."

"Then how did it happen that an old lady, a rather curious old lady, with short hair and a white handkerchief over her head like a shawl, was allowed to find her way into my room?"

"If you'll give me the particulars, I'll have the staff on duty questioned."

As he turned away, he threw back across his shoulder: "I shan't be going to bed yet. If you discover anything you might report it."

Half an hour later he was summoned to the telephone. "About your visitor, sir; no one saw her."

Far into the early hours of the morning he sat cogitating. What steps ought he to take to protect himself? He could place his case in the hands of the police, but if he did, he might stir up a hornet's nest. Most certainly he would be compelled to postpone his business on the Continent and to prolong his stay in England. But more disastrous than personal inconvenience, in going to the police he might be the means of putting Santa's enemies on her track. They would expect him to make a clean breast of everything; he would find difficulty in inventing convincing motives to explain the shiftiness of his conduct since landing.

If he could speak to Santa, he would know how to act. If she were really implicated in the Rogo-

vich affair, his best way of helping her would be to clear out of England. But if she could assure him of her innocence, he was prepared to stay and back her to the limit of his capacity. Across the jet-black sky the silver moon drifted like a water-lily—a parable of Santa, moving immaculately among rumors of darkest misdoings. Whatever she had done had not quenched her purity. If she had done the worst of which she was accused, her perverted mother-love still clothed her with the tatters of a tragic goodness.

He jerked himself irritably back to reality. How could a woman who had spread death with her beauty still retain her purity? He had been warned that she trapped men by appealing not to their baseness, but to their chivalry. What wild-eyed feat of chivalry was this that he was performing? It was best to dispense with casuistry. The accumulated slanders to which he had listened had spurred his curiosity. They had changed a modishly attractive woman into a romantic figure—a figure which, if it were not noble, at least possessed the virtue of lonely courage.

He would allow himself four days in England. If he had not heard from her by then, he would go about his business. Having to this extent set a limit to his difficulties, he took himself off to bed.

III

His first anxiety next morning was to scan the papers. He had all the London dailies brought to him and read them before he dressed. For the most part they told him nothing new, merely recording, with varying degrees of sensationalism, the indisputable fact that Prince Rogovich had vanished. One or two hinted at foul play. Several suggested accidental drowning. The bulk of them, and among these were the most reputable, presumed that the Prince had had private reasons for avoiding England and landing at a Continental port *incognito*. Santa Gorlof's name was not mentioned. He found nothing to confirm the warnings of last night or to alarm himself on her account.

It was later, while eating breakfast with the *Times* propped up before him, that he came across an item which set him viewing what had happened from a new angle. He was skipping through a sketch of the Prince's career, when he stumbled on the following paragraph: "It will be remembered how last summer the Polish women's sense of injustice concentrated in a silent protest. For an entire week, day and night, never less than a thousand mothers, each carrying a dead child in her breast, camped about the Rogovich Palace in Warsaw."

Glancing back, he read more carefully the information which led up to the paragraph: "During the two years following the close of the war, Poland, to-

gether with most of Central Europe, has suffered intensely from famine. Children have contributed by far the largest proportion to the toll of death. For much of this, so far as Poland is concerned, Prince Rogovich has been held accountable. The national wealth which he has squandered on equipping armies might have been spent more profitably in purchasing foodstuffs. The trip to America, from which he was returning at the time of his mysterious disappearance, is said to have had as its object the floating of a loan which would enable his Generals to maintain their offensives for at least another twelve months. While the land-owning party in Poland, supported by French diplomacy, backed him up, his imperialistic policies were bitterly condemned by Polish mothers who had to watch their children perishing from starvation in order that frontiers might be extended. Already the death-rate was so high that it was impossible to supply sufficient coffins. At mid-day the main streets of Warsaw were jammed with funerals. Many of these funerals consisted of only two persons: a man and woman, themselves weak from want of nourishment, staggering under the puny load of a bundle wrapped in paper, containing the body of the latest son or daughter to die of hunger." Then followed the brief description of how the thousand Polish mothers had camped for a week in protest about the Prince's palace.

Hindwood looked up from his paper, gazing across the flashing gulf of sunlight to where the azure sea of distant sky beat against the embattled strand

of housetops. If Santa had pushed the Prince overboard, had that been her motive—that Polish children might no longer die of hunger? Perhaps always, if indeed she had killed men, her purpose had been to act as the scourge of the enemies of children. The memory of her own dead child had urged her. Mistakenly, but none the less valiantly, she had constituted herself the avenger of all mothers who had been despoiled by masculine callousness.

What round-about journeys he was willing to undertake if only he might excuse her! Even though he were compelled to admit her guilt, he was determined to adjudge her magnanimous. At any rate, she had not been apprehended.

With a lighter heart than he had experienced for some hours, he dismissed her from his thoughts and set out to fulfill his round of engagements.

It was three o'clock when he returned. Immediately, on entering his room he noticed that a sheet of writing-paper had been pinned conspicuously to the pillow of his bed. Its evident purpose was to attract his attention. On approaching it, he saw that the message which it contained was printed in large letters and unsigned. It read:

"If you wish to see her, follow but do not speak to the widow."

It didn't make sense. What widow? The "her" whom he could see by following the widow referred presumably to Santa. But who had pinned the sheet of paper to his pillow? How had this person gained access to his rooms? That morning, when he went

out, he had locked his door and left his key at the hotel desk. He had in his possession confidential papers of almost state importance. If their secrets were shared, he might just as well pack up and return to America. His sense that he was the storm-center of a conspiracy strengthened.

Seizing his hat and gloves, he hurried down-stairs. He had just time to lodge a complaint with the management before keeping his next appointment.

He had alighted from the elevator and was about to cross the foyer, when a woman rose from a chair near by and passed immediately in front of him. He jerked himself up with a murmured apology; then noticed that she was gowned in the heaviest widow's mourning. A coincidence, he thought, and yet not so very extraordinary! He was proceeding on his journey, when his eyes chanced to follow her. She had halted uncertainly, as though she had forgotten something; by the poise of her head, he guessed that behind her veil she was gazing at him. More to satisfy his curiosity than as the preface to an adventure, he also halted. Somewhat ostentatiously he drew from his pocket the sheet of note-paper which he had found pinned to his pillow. Unfolding it, he reread its printed message:

"If you wish to see her, follow but do not speak to the widow."

He looked up. Slowly, almost imperceptibly, the veiled figure nodded. He made a step, as if to approach her. Instantly she turned and passed out.

HE PLUNGES INTO ROMANCE 111

Without further consideration, in his eagerness to see what she would do next, he followed.

IV

He had expected that outside the hotel, in the throng of anonymous traffic, she would wait for him. Without giving any further sign that she was aware of him, she moved quietly through the fashionable crowd of Piccadilly and turned into the sunlit leisure of St. James Street. The unconscious gaiety of her way of walking was strangely out of keeping with her garments of bereavement. Hindwood's curiosity was piqued. In a shamefaced way he was overwhelmingly interested. He felt himself capable of a great romance. For the moment he was almost grateful for the annoyances that had presented him with so thrilling an opportunity.

What was he meant to do? The message had forbidden him to accost her. He had been ordered merely to follow. How long and whither? At the Foreign Office a high official was waiting for him, expecting every minute to hear him announced. To wander through London after an unknown woman was the trick of a gallant or a moonstruck boy. He was neither. He was a man of discretion, who aimed at becoming the advisor of statesmen and yet his conduct was open to every misinterpretation. He began to feel himself a scoundrel. For a man whose

emotions had always been shepherded, the sensation was exciting and not wholly unpleasant.

If he could only learn something about her! Crossing to the opposite pavement, he hurried his pace till he was abreast of her.

She was young. Her figure was slight and upright. She was about the same build as Santa, but seemed taller. If she were indeed Santa, this impression of added height might be due to the somberness of her attire. She was so carefully veiled that even her hair was hidden; there was no feature by which he could identify her. He tried another experiment. Recrossing the street to a point some distance ahead, he loitered before a shop, making a self-conscious pretense of studying its wares. He heard the rustle of her crêpe as she drew near him. She went by him so closely that she almost touched him. He was conscious of the faint fragrance of her perfume. In the window he caught the dim reflection of her figure. At the moment that she was immediately behind him, she moved her head in a backward gesture, seeming to indicate that he should follow. When he turned to obey, she was drifting through the September sunshine, completely self-absorbed and unnoticing.

Traveling the yard of St. James Palace, she entered the Mall. There she hesitated, giving him time to catch up with her. A taxi was crawling by. She hailed it. Addressing the driver, but glancing directly at himself, she said in a sweet, distinct voice:

“Victoria Station. The Brighton platform.”

V

Was she Santa? The voice had sounded different, yet, had his life depended on it, he could not have decided. There was only one way of finding out—by joining her on the Brighton platform. This would mean missing his appointment at the Foreign Office. He was prepared to make the sacrifice, but he had no guarantee that the chase would end there. It was possible that she would still refuse to satisfy his curiosity and compel him to accompany her further. His rôle was that of the incautious fly. But who was the master-spinner of this web in which it was intended that he should become entangled? Was it the Little Grandmother? He had asked her whether they would meet again. In the light of present happenings, her answer took on a sinister meaning, "Will you want to to-morrow?"

As he stood there in the sunshine of the Mall, with the thud of fashionable equipages flashing by, a sullen conviction grew up within him that he was becoming afraid. An empty taxi hove in sight. He beckoned. Before it had halted, he was standing on the running-board.

"To Victoria Station. The Brighton platform."

The driver took his brevity for a sign that a train was to be caught by the narrowest of margins. He made such speed that they drew up against the curb just as the widow's vehicle was departing. She threw him a furtive glance from behind her veil, then turned

and moved away as though he were the completest stranger. Imitating her discretion, he followed at a distance.

Halting before the ticket-office, she produced her purse. He edged nearer; it was necessary that he should learn her destination.

"A first-class single to Seafold," he heard her say.

When his turn came, he repeated her words, adding: "How long before it starts?"

"Five minutes," the clerk told him.

As he gathered up his change, he was surprised to observe how little was left out of his pound. He had supposed Seafold would prove to be a suburb. By the cost of his ticket he estimated that it must be a journey of at least sixty miles. Was it worth the taking? Could he return that same evening? He might get stranded. If that happened, he was unprepared to spend the night. These considerations were swept aside when he noticed that the widow had once more vanished.

Accosting a porter, "The Seafold platform?" he asked breathlessly.

"Same as the one for Brighton."

"That tells me nothing. There's no luggage. Show me."

Before he had passed the barrier, he was aware that the train was crowded. In third-class compartments passengers were standing. To discover any one under these circumstances would be a labor of patience. Carriage-doors were being banged and locked. Even at this final moment his habitual cau-

tion reasserted itself. What else but folly could result from an adventure so recklessly undertaken?

The porter caught him by the arm. "'Ere you are, mister. 'Op in. You're lucky."

No sooner had he squeezed himself into the remaining seat than, with a groaning jerk, the train started.

VI

Lucky! The luckiest thing that could have happened to him would have been to be left behind. Here he was, following a woman whose face he had not seen, to a place which, up to a few moments ago, he had not known existed. Even to believe that he was following her required optimism; he had no proof that she was on the train. Probably it had been part of her strategy to send him scurrying on this fool's errand, in order that her accomplices might be undisturbed while they ransacked his rooms in his absence.

"I'll make an end of this nonsense," he told himself, "by alighting at the next stopping-place."

But where was the next stopping-place? He glanced along the double row of his fellow-passengers, barricaded behind their papers. He wanted to ask his question and watched for an opportunity. At last, losing patience, he nudged the man beside him.

"Excuse me, sir; I'm a stranger. I've made a mistake. My ticket's to Seafold, wherever that may be, and I—"

With his nose still glued to the page, the man muttered: "That's all right. You don't need to worry. It's where you're going."

"But it isn't all right," Hindwood contradicted with a shade of annoyance. "I don't want to go to Seafold; I want to return to London. What I'm trying to ask you is where can I get out?"

"Lewes, if you think it's worth while."

"Why shouldn't I think it's worth while?"

The paper rustled testily and was raised a few inches higher. "Because Lewes is almost at Seafold. It's the junction where you change—the one and only stop between here and Brighton."

Turning away disgustedly, he watched the swiftly changing landscape. Everything that met his eyes was beautiful, with a domestic, thought-out, underlying tenderness. It had all been planned, that was what he felt, by the loving labor of countless generations. In a homeless man like himself the sight created a realization of forlornness. He had traveled five continents and had planted his affections nowhere. It was the same with his human relations. He could reckon his acquaintances by the thousand, yet there was no one to whom he was indispensably dear. By a mental transition, the implication of which he scarcely appreciated, he began to think of Santa.

They were slowing down. He was surprised to discover that an hour had gone by. The man at his side folded up his paper. Now that they were about to part, he considered it safe to be friendly.

"We're coming into Lewes," he said with a smile. "The Seafold train will be waiting just across the platform. You can't miss it."

Hindwood thanked him brusquely.

What to do next? If he were fortunate in catching an express, he could be in London in time to dine. As he stepped out, he saw the Seafold local waiting. What good would it do him to go to Seafold? Yet to quit now would be humiliatingly unadventurous. He was moving slowly towards the stair, when he was arrested by a voice.

"If you wouldn't mind? It was stupid of me to drop it."

He turned sharply. She was leaning out of a carriage window which he was in the act of passing.

Without giving him time to question, she explained: "My ticket—it slipped from my hand. There it is behind you."

The moment he had stooped and returned it, she withdrew herself. It had happened so quickly that he had no chance to guess at the features behind the heavy veil. With a promptitude of decision which almost deceived himself, as though he had never harbored any other intention, he opened the door and clambered into the carriage next to hers.

"That's that," he thought, smiling tolerantly at his relieved sense of satisfaction. And then, "It was no accident. She saw that I was giving up the chase. She did it to keep me going. What's her game?"

Whatever her game was, he was well on the road to

enlightenment. The engine was puffing through a valley, across salt-marshes intersected by dykes and sluggish streams, where derelict boats lay sunken in the mud, rotting among the wild-flowers. Grazing sheep made the quiet plaintive with their cries. Gulls, disturbed by the train's impetuous onrush, rose and drifted lazily into the peace that slumbered further inland. Of a sudden, with a gesture of exaltation, the gleaming chalk-cliffs of the coast leaped into sight and beyond them the dull flash of the Channel.

He was clamorous with excitement. Curiosity beat masterfully on the door of the future. He had to find out. Why had he been brought here? What had Santa to do with it? Who was the woman in the next compartment?

They had halted several times. Each time he had watched carefully to see whether she was eluding him. Again their speed was slackening. They were entering a little, sandy town, dotted with red-brick villas, bleached by the wind and sun. He caught glimpses between the houses of a battered esplanade, of concrete breakwaters partly destroyed, of a pebbly beach alternately sucked down and quarrelsome hurled back by the waves. Over all hung the haunting fragrance of salt, and gorse, and wild thyme.

They had come to a standstill. Passengers were climbing out and greeting friends. A porter flung wide the door of his carriage, shouting, "Seafold! Seafold!"

Having watched her alight, he followed. She was

a few paces ahead, picking her way daintily through the crowd. Again she was all discretion and gave no hint that she had noticed him. Outside the gate, cabmen offered themselves for hire. She shook her head denyingly and passed on with her tripping step. Not until the station had been left behind did he remember that he ought to have inquired at what times the trains departed for London. Too late! His immediate business was keeping her in sight.

With the unhesitating tread of one familiar with her surroundings, she chose what seemed to be the most important street. It was narrow and flanked by little, stooping cottages, most of which had been converted into shops which cater to the needs of tourists. It was the end of the season. A few remaining visitors were sauntering aimlessly up and down. Natives, standing in groups, had the appearance of being fishermen. Some of them nodded to her respectfully; without halting, she passed them with a pleasant word. At the bottom of the street she turned into a road, paralleling the sea-front, which led through a waste of turf and sand into the wind-swept uplands of the open country. Just where the country met the town there stood a lath-and-plaster house, isolated, facing seaward, creeper-covered, surrounded by high hedges. It was more pretentious than any he had seen as yet. Giving no sign that she was aware she was followed, she pushed open the rustic gate, passed up the red-tiled path, produced a latch-key, and admitted herself. There, in the bare stretch of road, having lured him all the

way from London, without a single backward glance or any sign that would betray her recognition of his presence, she left him.

VII

"Just what I might have expected," he said aloud.

"Did you speak ter me, mister?"

He swung round to find a freckled, bare-legged urchin gazing up at him.

"I didn't. Who are you?"

"A caddy from them links over there." He pointed a grubby finger along the road to where, half a mile away, the level of the seashore swept up into a bold, green headland.

"Then I guess you're the sort of boy I'm looking for. Who lives in this house?"

"A Madam Something or other. 'Er name sounds Russian."

"What does she look like?"

"Dunno. She's a widdler and covers 'erself up. Not but what she 'as gentlemen friends as visits 'er."

"You seem a sharp boy. Can you tell me how long she's lived here?"

"Maybe a year; off and on that's ter say. I don't recollect."

"Is she by herself?"

"There's an old woman in the garden sometimes as looks a 'undred. She wears a white hanky tied round 'er 'ead."

"I think that's all I want to ask you. Here's something for you. Oh yes, do you happen to know about the trains to London?"

"The last one's gorn, mister, if that's what yer means. It's the one that our gents at the golf-links aims ter catch."

"Then I'm out of luck. Good evening, sonny, and thank you for your information."

The bare legs showed no signs of departing; the freckled face still gazed up.

"What's interesting you. My way of speaking? I'm American."

The boy shook his head. "We 'ad Canadian soldiers 'ere during the war; they're pretty near Americans."

"Then what is it?"

"It's that you're the second gent to-day to slip me a shilling for telling 'im about this 'ouse. And it's something else." He sank his voice to a whisper. "Don't look round. There's been some one a-peeking from be'ind a bedroom winder most of the time as we've been talkin'. I'd best be goin'. Good evenin', mister."

Not to attract attention by loitering, Hindwood set off at a businesslike pace down the road toward the headland. As he drew further away from the house, he walked more slowly; he was trying to sort out his facts. The woman who lived there had a Russian name. Santa Gorlof! She dressed like a widow. That would be to disguise herself. The news about the gentlemen friends who visited her was quite in keeping with the character which the Major had

bestowed on her, but not at all welcome. She had lived there for a year, off and on. Her companion was an old woman, nearly a hundred—the Little Grandmother! But who was this man who earlier in the day had bribed the boy that he might obtain precisely the same information? He reminded himself that the police were hunting for her. The man might be a detective. If justice had already run her to earth, Seafold was the last place in which he ought to be found. If the boy had been accurate about the trains, there was no escape till the morning. Even though he were to hire an automobile, he would be placing his visit to Seafold on record. Self-preservation rose up rampant. What a fool he'd been to involve himself in so perilous an affair!

And yet, once more and for the last time, he longed to see Santa's face. Why was it? Was it because her hearsay wickedness fascinated him? It was not because he loved her. It was not to gratify morbid curiosity—at least not entirely. Perhaps it was because he pitied her and, against his will, discovered a certain grandeur in her defiance. She had played a lone hand. Like a beast of prey in the jungle, she was surrounded; at this moment she must be listening for the stealthy tread of those who were encompassing her destruction, yet she had not lost her cunning. She was fighting to the end. Probably this time, as when the firing-squad waited for her in the woods of Vincennes, she was planning to employ a man as her substitute—*himself*. The fact remained that in her desperate need, she had appealed

HE PLUNGES INTO ROMANCE 123

to him for help. There was the barest chance that she was innocent—a victim of false-appearing circumstances. He wanted to judge her for himself by tearing aside the widow's veil and gazing on her destroying beauty.

Turning off the road, he struck across the links, climbing toward the towering headland. The wind, coming in gusts, rustled the parched gorse and brittle fronds of bracken. Behind his back the sun was setting, flinging a level bar of gold across the leaden sea. In sudden lulls, when the wind ceased blowing, the air pulsated with the rhythmic cannonading of waves assaulting the wall of cliffs. When he listened intently, he could hear the *ha-ha* of their cheering and their sullen moan as they were beaten back. It was strange to think that two weeks ago he had been in New York, intent on nothing but acquiring a fortune. Women had not troubled him. Why should he now permit this woman, chance-met on ship-board, to divert him—a woman who could never be closer to him?

He had reached the summit of the promontory. Etched against the sky-line, his figure must be visible for miles. The sun sank lower and vanished. Gazing through the clear atmosphere, far below him he could discern every detail of the house to which he had been tempted. It looked a fitting nest for an old poet. It held no hint of terror. At the same time it was strategically well situated for occupants who wished to keep an eye on all approaches.

He had been watching for any sign of movement,

when a curious thing happened. Though no figure appeared, from one of the upper windows a white cloth fluttered. He shaded his eyes with his hand. The signal was repeated. He tapped his breast and pointed, as much as to say, "Shall I come?" The cloth was shaken vigorously. On repeating the experiment, he obtained the same result. When he nodded his head in assent, the fluttering ended.

So every step of his progress had been observed by some one spying through a telescope from behind the curtained windows! The first moment he had afforded an opportunity by looking back, the signaling had commenced. That so much secrecy should be employed seemed to betoken that Santa's case was desperate. That she should have run the risk of tempting him down from London must mean that he possessed some peculiar facility for rendering her a much needed service.

The imminence of the danger, both to her and to himself, was emphasized by this latest precaution. She had not dared to admit him to the house or even to acknowledge his presence, until she had made certain that he, in his turn, was not followed.

This thought, that he might be followed, filled him with an entirely new sensation; it peopled every clump of gorse and bed of bracken with possible unseen enemies. The rustling of the wind, the cry of a sea-bird, made him turn alertly, scanning with suspicion every hollow and mound of the wild, deserted landscape. It seemed unwise to allow his actions to announce his intentions too plainly. What his in-

HE PLUNGES INTO ROMANCE 125

tentions were he was not very certain. His immediate inclination was to shake himself free from the whole mysterious complication.

Continuing his ramble, he assumed a careless gait, descending the further side of the promontory and bearing always slightly inland, so that his course might lead back eventually to the road from which he had departed. As dusk was gathering, he found himself entering an abandoned military camp. The bare hutments, with their dusty windows and padlocked doors, stretched away in seeming endless avenues of ghostly silence. The Maple Leaf, painted on walls and sign-boards, explained the village boy's reference to Canadian soldiers. He had reached the heart of it, when he was possessed by the overpowering sensation that human eyes were gazing at him. Pulling himself up, he glanced back across his shoulder, crooking his arm to ward off a blow. Realizing what he was doing, he relaxed and stared deliberately about him. Nothing! No sign of life! Yet the certainty remained that human eyes were watching.

"Nerves!" he muttered contemptuously.

It was dark when, leaving the camp, he struck the road. Stars were coming out. Far away along the coast the distant lights of a harbor blinked and twinkled. He hurried his steps. His mind was made up. He would get something to eat in Seafold, discover a garage, hire a car and be back in London by midnight. To confirm his will in this decision, he began making plans for the morrow.

To enter the town he had to pass the house. As

its bulk gathered shape, his feet moved more slowly. Long before he came opposite it, he had caught the fragrance of the myrtle in its hedges. The windows which looked his way were shrouded. He paused for a moment outside the rustic gate. He was saying good-by to adventure. He was too old. His season for pardonable folly was ended. The prose of life had claimed him.

Prolonging the pretense of temptation, he pushed open the gate. A hand touched his—a woman's. The desire to play safe faded. Weakly capitulating, he allowed himself to be led up the path and across the shadowy threshold. The door of the darkened house closed behind him. She was slipping the bolts into place.

VIII

He listened. He could not see her face—only the blurred outline of her figure. Except for the sound of her movements, the silence was unbroken. At the end of a passage, leading from the hall, a streak of gold escaped along the carpet.

“Santa!”

No answer.

“Santa, why have you brought me?”

Gliding past him down the passage, she darted into the lighted room, leaving the door ajar behind her. He followed gropingly. As he entered, he was momentarily confused by the sudden change from darkness.

HE PLUNGES INTO ROMANCE 127

She was addressing him in a small, strained voice. "There's no need to be afraid."

He looked about him, searching for the inspirer of fear. There was no one save themselves. Then he noticed how she trembled. She was making a brave effort to appear collected, but it was plain that she was wild with terror. Her eyes were wide and dilated. She stood on the defensive, backed against the fireplace, as though she were expecting violence. Her right hand was in advance of her body. It held something which caught the glow of the flames—a nickel-plated revolver, cocked and ready for immediate action. His reception was so different from anything he had anticipated that he stared with an amused expression of inquiry.

At last he asked, "You knew from the start that I thought you were Santa?"

Biting her lip to prevent herself from crying, she nodded. Far from being Santa, she was fair as any Dane, with China-blue eyes and the complexion of a wild rose. He noted the little wisps of curls which made a haze of gold about her forehead. She wore turquoise earrings. They were her only adornment. She herself was a decoration. She was like a statue of the finest porcelain, so flawless that she seemed unreal. Had it not been for her widow's mourning, he would have said that she was untouched by passionate experience. She had an appearance of provoking innocence, which made the paleness of her beauty ardent as a flame.

Speaking quietly, "I'm not easily frightened," he

INTO ROMANCE 129

elf in the train, I was ex-
e time I'd arrived at Lewes,
mind to abandon the chase.
I'd wasted so much of my af-
being beaten. You'd roused
seafool, you dodged me and
road like a dummy. That
y patience; I was mad clean
if I never saw you again.
on the headland, I signaled
I wasn't. I was tired of
When you caught me at
with temptation, but I'd
be back in London by mid-
can scarcely blame me for
on the other foot entirely.
inconvenience merely to tell
you don't want to shoot me."

the thing away? You're
I am."
to use it."

ned up the edges of her
to keep you here, if once
ou inside."

You hate having me here,
o. Isn't that the way the
s in the same fix: I didn't

said; "and you, while you keep me covered with that revolver, have no reason to be afraid. Any moment you choose you can kill me—you've only to press the trigger."

Tears of horror sprang into her eyes. "But I don't want to kill you."

"Then why don't you lay it aside?"

"Because—" She gazed at him appealingly. "Because I'm alone. I may need it to protect myself."

"From me? No. I should think you can see that."

Was the house really empty? He listened. It was possible that some one might steal up from behind. He did not dare to turn. His only chance of preventing her from shooting him was to keep her engaged in conversation.

"If you feel this way, why did you go to such elaborate pains to force me to visit you to-night? You must have known that I didn't want to come. It isn't I who have intruded." He smiled cheerfully. "At the risk of appearing rude, I'll be frank with you. When you crossed my path at the Ritz, I was on the point of keeping a most important engagement. When I followed you out of the hotel, it was because of a message I'd found pinned to my pillow, 'Follow the widow.' So it wasn't you in particular that I was following; I'd have followed any widow. I expected that you'd speak to me as soon as we were in the street. I'd no intention of giving up my appointment. You didn't; you led me on, further and further, a step at a time. I don't mind telling you





*Tears of horror sprang into her China-blue eyes.
"But I don't want to kill you."*

*"Then why not throw the thing away? You're
far more scared than I am."*

that when I found myself in the train, I was extremely annoyed. By the time I'd arrived at Lewes, I'd fully made up my mind to abandon the chase. Then you spoke to me. I'd wasted so much of my afternoon that I didn't like being beaten. You'd roused my curiosity. Here in Seafold, you dodged me and left me standing in the road like a dummy. That used up the fag-end of my patience; I was mad clean through. I didn't care if I never saw you again. When you signaled me on the headland, I signaled back that I was coming. I wasn't. I was tired of being led on and eluded. When you caught me at the gate, I was flirting with temptation, but I'd already laid my plans to be back in London by midnight. So you see you can scarcely blame me for being here. The shoe's on the other foot entirely. You've put me to great inconvenience merely to tell me, it would seem, that you don't want to shoot me."

"I don't."

"Then why not throw the thing away? You're far more scared of it than I am."

"Because I may have to use it."

"On whom?"

"You."

"Why?"

A sweet, slow smile turned up the edges of her mouth. "My orders were to keep you here, if once I'd managed to persuade you inside."

He laughed outright. "You hate having me here, and you'd hate to see me go. Isn't that the way the land lies? I'm more or less in the same fix: I didn't

want to come, and I don't want to stay. The fact remains that we're both here. Why not make the best of it? If you'll stop brandishing that weapon, I'll feel much more comfortable. I'm not trying to escape."

"You might."

For the first time he dared to shift his position. "Don't be alarmed," he warned her. "That's easier. I was stiff. Now, if you'll listen, I've a proposal to make. You're treating me like a burglar, which isn't fair. You may know, but I've not the least idea how long you intend to hold me prisoner. I guess you're waiting for some one else to arrive, but that's neither here nor there. Before the third person comes, you may have shot me—of course, by accident. Revolvers go off if you keep them too long pointed. You know nothing about firearms, and I'm beginning to be rather fond of life. Here's what I propose: if you'll put it away, I'll give you my parole not to come within two yards of you or to attempt to escape. If I want my parole back, you shall have a full five minutes' notice."

"If I thought that I could trust you—"

"You can. Is it a bargain?"

Without answering, placing her weapon on the mantelpiece, she turned her back on him. She seemed waiting to hear him advance further into the room. He did not stir.

"What is it, Mr. Hindwood?"

"It's that I've just remembered one thing for which our armistice has not provided. You'd better

HE PLUNGES INTO ROMANCE 131

pick up your gun again. It's that I haven't dined. I wonder whether you'd let me into the village—"

He left his sentence unended. He suddenly perceived that she was shaken with sobbing. In his concern, he forgot his compact as to distance and hurried over to her side. She swung round, her face blinded with tears. As she stumbled past him, she muttered:

"You've beaten me. You're not afraid. I couldn't shoot you now if I wanted."

IX

Tiptoeing to the threshold, he turned the handle and peeped into the passage. As before, everything was in darkness.

He was free to go. There was nothing to stop him—nothing except his honor. It was easy to argue that even his honor did not prevent him. He had canceled his parole when he had reopened negotiations by telling her to pick up her revolver. She had left it behind her on the mantel-shelf. He took it in his hand and examined it. It was a repeater. Every chamber was loaded. He whistled softly—so she had meant business! Setting the hammer at half-cock, he slipped the weapon in his pocket. He was master of the situation now.

Why didn't he go? Two hours of steady driving, three at the most, and he could be in London. He reminded himself that at this very moment his

private papers might be in the process of being ransacked. What if they were? The possibility left him utterly indifferent. He couldn't save them after the lapse of another three hours.

No, the truth was that since his voyage on the *Ryndam* all the emphases of his life were becoming altered. The importance of money and power no longer seemed paramount. After nearly forty years of living, he had awakened to the fact that it was women who shed a radiance of glamour in an otherwise gloomy world. Of all human adventures they were the most enthralling and the least certain of rewarding.

It was curiosity that had enticed him into his present entanglements; his curiosity had yet to be satisfied. With a revolver in his pocket, he felt that he now possessed the means of extracting the right answers to his questions. He had suffered mild inconveniences, but so far he hadn't done so badly. He had established mysterious relations with two beautiful women. One of them was already under the same roof; the other, he believed, was momentarily expected. He began to figure himself as a poet, a dreamer, a potential storm-center of romance.

"And all because she has blue eyes!" he hinted.

Then he remembered that Santa's eyes were gray, and that up to the last half-hour it had been Santa whom he had supposed that he was following.

He gazed about him, making an inspection of the room, trying to guess at the characters of its inhabitants. It was square and small. Its walls were

lined ceiling-high with shelves overloaded with books of a learned appearance. A work-basket stood on a mahogany desk with mending, scissors, and reels of cotton strewn near it. A piano had been crushed into a corner, looking flippantly out of place amid these scholarly surroundings. Below the mantelshelf was a rack containing a row of pipes. Set about wherever a space allowed were vases of freshly cut flowers.

The contradictions of the room suggested that it had once been a man's den, but had now been taken over by a woman. This seemed to indicate that the owner of the house was actually a widow.

Almost the whole of the wall confronting the door was occupied by a tall French window, which opened directly on a lawn. Shrubs grew waist-high about it. Instinct told him that this was the likeliest approach for the other person, by whose order his kidnaping had been plotted. He felt convinced that this person would prove to be a woman, but he was taking no chances. With the night behind her, she could spy on him for hours without being detected. She might be spying on him now.

Assuming a listless manner, he seated himself to one side of the fireplace. Out of the tail of his eye, without seeming to do so, he watched the shadowy panes. His right hand was thrust into his pocket, gripping the revolver.

After the lapse of some minutes, he heard in the passage the widow's returning footsteps. Out-

side the door she halted, fumbling at the handle. Giving up the attempt, she called to him to open. Just as he was rising, a face, tense with eagerness, lifted itself out of the bushes, peering in on him.

CHAPTER THE FOURTH

HE BECOMES PART OF THE GAME

I

THE face hung there against the darkness for a second; then the leaves closed over it as it was stealthily withdrawn. In the utterness of his astonishment, Hindwood all but gave himself away. It was not the face he had expected.

Masking his excitement with a yawn, he turned his back on the window and stepped toward the door, opening it sufficiently to thrust his head into the passage, but not wide enough to permit the watcher in the bushes to learn anything of the person with whom he talked. He found his captress standing just beyond the threshold, carrying a tray, which accounted for her awkwardness.

"You won't have to dine in the village," she explained. Then, catching his strange expression, "What has happened?"

"Some one was to come to-night," he whispered: "the person who gave orders for my kidnaping. Isn't that so? She was to enter through the window from the lawn, while you held me prisoner at the revolver's point."

"Is she here?"

"No, but a man who is her enemy—a Major Cleasby. He's hiding directly in her path. He supposed you were she when you tried the door. He showed his face. Is there any way in which we can warn her?"

The widow set down her tray. Her eyes met his searchingly. "If the man were there, you wouldn't want to save her."

"Why not? You think I've invented the man in the bushes in order that Santa may be scared away? I'm no more afraid of Santa than I was of you. Besides, in your absence I've stolen your revolver. Ah, that convinces you! The man's her husband and a secret service agent. I can feel his eyes in my back. If you don't warn her, she'll be caught. There must have been some prearranged signal. What was it?"

Instead of answering, she pressed nearer, glancing fearfully across her shoulder into the unlighted hall. Her voice came so faintly that he could only just hear her.

"She wouldn't spare us. Why should you and I—? You don't know what she intended."

He smiled grimly. "I can guess. I was to have been her scapegoat for the Rogovich murder. She was staging a new version of what happened in the woods of Vincennes. Whether she escaped or was brought to trial, I was to have been arrested. By that time she would have clothed me with the appearance of her guilt. I was to have figured as her lover and the Prince's rival. The motive for my crime was

HE BECOMES PART OF THE GAME 187

to have been jealousy. The old story—an innocent man dying in her stead!"

"If you think you know that, why should you, unless you are her lover?"

"Because she's a woman."

Her hands seized his, coaxing him from the doorway into the darkened passage. "For the love of God, go!" she implored. "I give you back your parole."

Drawing her to him, he held her fast. "Don't struggle. He might hear you. You decoyed me. You trapped me. Why this change? What makes you so concerned for my safety?"

"I didn't know," she panted, "the kind of man you are."

"What kind?"

Her heart beat wildly. She lay against him un-stirring, her face averted. The moment he released her, she burst forth into new pleading.

"For my sake. I beg of you."

Into the grimness of his smiling there stole a gleam of tenderness. "And leave you? I guess not. What's the signal?"

"The piano."

"Come, then," he said, "you shall play for me. While you play, if we mask our expressions, we can talk of what we choose. Outwardly, to deceive the man in the bushes, we must act a part. I'm an old friend. I've dropped in unexpectedly. You've provided me with supper. While I eat, we chatter and laugh. You sit at the piano and sing for me

occasionally. When the hour for Santa's arrival is past, I take my leave. If you're brave, we can carry the farce through. Are you game?"

For answer she picked up the tray and stepped into the room, smiling back at him as he followed.

"I'm your humble servant, as always, Mr. Hindwood, but I have only two hands and they're occupied. If you'll bring up that table—yes, set it before the fire. That's right. You must be comfortable, if I'm to sing for you."

II

"She won't come now."

The words reached him in a sigh. The pale hands fluttered from the keyboard. The fair head drooped. Almost instantly she straightened herself, banishing her appearance of weariness. "Don't think that I'm showing the white feather. It's only that I'm exhausted. She won't come now. I'm sure of it." Then, bending forward with a nervous tremor, "I daren't look round. Has he gone?"

Hindwood pushed back his chair from before the hearth. For the moment he did not answer. He was striving to restore the spell which the intrusion of her fear had broken. Glancing at her sideways, he regarded her quietly where she sat at the piano in her widow's garb. Through the window at her back he caught a glimpse of the garden, shadowy and patched with moonlight. Above the silence he heard

HE BECOMES PART OF THE GAME 189

the rumble of waves, sifting the pebbles on the shore. Who was she, this woman who possessed the magic to enchant him? Who had been her husband? What kind of man? Had she loved him? How long since he had died? There were so many questions.

She had persuaded him into following her, well knowing that he believed her to be Santa. She had met his discovery of her impersonation with a threat. When the luck was all in her favor, with the panic of a stricken conscience she had thrown in her hand. For the past two hours, in this cozy room, she had surrounded him with shy intimacies of affection, to the end that the unseen spectator, listening outside the panes, might be beguiled. Apparently the deception had succeeded; the spectator had given no sign. It had succeeded too well for Hindwood. It had roused in him the longing that, behind her pretense of friendship, there might lurk a genuine emotion of liking. He had tried to forget that the scene was stage-set. He had wanted to believe that it was real.

“Has he gone?”

There was a break in her voice.

He pulled himself together. “Do you wish me to make certain?”

Rising, he lounged over to the piano as though to select a sheet from the pile of music. In a flash he turned, wrenching wide the doors of the French-window, and was across the step in a bound. Nothing rose from the shadows to disturb the peace of

the night. Stooping by the bushes, he made a hurried examination.

"Come," he called. Then, seeing how she pressed her hands against her mouth, "There's no need to fear."

When she was standing by his side, he explained: "To-morrow you might think that I'd tricked you. I want you to see for yourself. Here's where he was hiding when he peered in on me. The ground's trampled. The bushes are bent back."

"He may be still here," she whispered, "in the garden—somewhere."

Hindwood smiled reassuringly into her upturned face. "He wouldn't do you any harm if he were. Remember he's a secret service agent. As a matter of fact, he ought to make you feel safe."

"Safe!" She knotted her hands against her breast. "Shall I ever feel safe? Oh, if I could confess—to you, to any one!"

"If it would help——"

Without giving him a chance to finish his sentence, she plucked at his sleeve with the eagerness of a child. "Would you?"

"What?"

"Let me?"

III

They had reëntered the room, fastening the window securely behind them. When that was done, they had drawn the curtains across the panes. She

HE BECOMES PART OF THE GAME 141

had flung herself into a chair beside the fire and was waiting impatiently for him to join her. But he hovered in the center of the room, fingering his watch and looking troubled.

"What's delaying you?" she asked without turning.

He slipped his watch into his pocket. "I had no idea it was so late."

"Does that matter? Till morning there are no trains."

"I was thinking of hotels."

"They'll be shut."

"Precisely. So what am I——?"

"Stay with me," she said lazily.

The room became profoundly silent. The darkened house seemed to listen. Had he plumbed a new depth in this drama of betrayal at the moment when he hoped he had discovered loyalty? He had been deceived by women before. Had he not allowed Santa to deceive him, he would not have been here. He might tell himself that this woman was different. If a man did not tell himself that each new woman was different, the mischief of love would end.

He caught sight of her flaxen head and became ashamed of his reflections. It wasn't possible, if the soul was foul, that the flesh should be so fair. She had the wonder of the dawn in her eyes. Nothing that she had said or done could belie the frankness of her innocence. Standing behind her chair, he gazed down in puzzlement at her graciousness.

"There are conventions. We may have met un-

conventionally, but neither of us can afford to ignore them."

Without looking up, she answered, "If you were as alone as I am, you could afford to ignore anything."

"Perhaps I am."

"Then you understand."

"I think I understand." He spoke gently. "I suppose no man can ever be so lonely as a woman, especially as a woman who has lost her happiness, but I, too, have been lonely. Everybody has. The cowardice which comes of loneliness is responsible for nearly every wickedness. Most thefts, and cheatings, and even murders are committed in an effort to gain companionship. But you can't elude loneliness by short-cuts. Wherever you go, it's with you from birth to death. Brave people make it their friend. Cowards let it become their tempter. Loneliness is no excuse for wrong-doing, nor even for surrendering to the appearance of it."

"Preaching?"

"No. Trying to share with you my experience. Until this afternoon, you didn't know that I existed. All your life up to the last five minutes, you've been able to do without me. Don't be greedy and spoil everything before it's started. There's to-morrow."

"Why wait for to-morrow when I trust you now?"

He stooped lower. She had become irresistibly dear. In a rush he had found the clue to her char-

HE BECOMES PART OF THE GAME 143

acter—her childishness. She couldn't bear to postpone the things she wanted.

"Trust me! I wonder! You're the first woman to have the daring to tell me. I'm not sure that I feel complimented; at this hour of night one has to be a little cold to be trusted like that. But I trust you—which is strange after all that's happened. The person I distrust is myself. You're beautiful. The most beautiful——"

"Am I more beautiful than Santa?"

He caught the vision of her blue eyes glinting up at him. There was nothing roguish in their expression. They were pathetic in their earnestness. Her throat was stretched back, white and firm. Her lips were vivid and parted. Her question sounded like the ruse of a coquette, yet she seemed wholly unaware of her attraction.

He drew himself erect, staring at the wall that he might forbid himself the danger of looking at her. His voice came harsh and abrupt. "Your confession can keep till morning. One can say and unsay anything. It's deeds that can never be unsaid."

He had reached the door. She spoke dully.

"You despise me." And then, "All my life I've waited for to-morrows. Go quickly."

Glancing across his shoulder he saw her, a mist of gold in a great emptiness. Slowly he turned back.

"Can't you guess the reason for my going? I reverence you too much."

Clutching at his hands, she dragged herself to her feet. "It's friendship that I'm asking. What's the

use of reverence? Like me a little. You'd do more for Santa. Only to like me wouldn't cost you much."

IV

"I should have died if you'd left me." He was feeling both amused and annoyed at his surrender; at the same time he was on the alert for developments. She had extinguished the lamps. The sole illumination was the firelight. For what reason she had done it, whether as an aid to confession or as a discouragement to watchers, she allowed him to guess. Whatever the reason, the precaution was wise, but it increased the atmosphere of liaison. He had pushed back his chair to the extreme corner of the hearth, so that he was scarcely discernible. She sat where the glow from the coals beat up into her face. He saw her profile against a background of darkness.

"Died!" He pursed his lips in masculine omniscience. "You'd have gone to your bed and had a good night's rest."

"I shouldn't. I was in terror. I used to be afraid only by night; now it's both day and night. You're never afraid. You weren't afraid even when I——. How do you manage it?"

"By doing things, instead of thinking about the things that can be done to me. I've learned that what we fear never happens—fear's a waste of time. Fear's imagination playing tricks by pouncing out

HE BECOMES PART OF THE GAME 145

of cupboards. It's the idiot of the intellect, gibbering in the attic after nightfall. It's a coward, spreading cowardice with false alarms. It's a liar and a libeller; life's a thousand times kinder than fear would have us paint it."

She sighed happily. "It was kind to me to-night."

He waited for her confession to commence. She leaned back, her eyes half shut, watching the red landscape in the dancing flames. Time moved gently. Night seemed eternal. Her contentment proved contagious. Neither of them spoke. Nothing mattered save the comfort of her presence. In a hollow of the coals he invented a dream cottage to which he would take her. It had a scarlet wood behind it and mountains with ruby-tinted caves. As the fire settled, the mirage faded.

"Does it strike you as comic," he questioned, "that you and I should sit here after midnight and that I shouldn't even know what to call you?"

"Varensky. Anna Varensky."

"Russian?"

She nodded.

"But are you Russian?"

"I'm Ivan Varensky's wife."

"You say it proudly, as though I ought to know who Ivan Varensky was."

She turned her head slowly, wondering at him. "There's only one Ivan Varensky: the man who wanted to be like Christ."

Hindwood jerked himself into wakefulness. "I'm afraid I need enlightenment. I don't——"

"You do," she contradicted patiently, "or rather, you will when I've helped you to recall him. How hurt he would be, poor Ivan, that a man of your standing should so soon have forgotten him! He hoped to make such a noise in the world. After Czardom had fallen, he aimed to be a savior, healing men with words. But he wanted to be crucified at once. He cared more for Calvary than for the road that led up to it. He was an emotionalist, impatient of Gethsemane; it was the crown of thorns that he coveted. Having only words with which to save humanity, he dashed all over Russia in special trains, speechifying at every halting-place, foretelling his approaching end. He had no time to waste; he believed his days were numbered. His message was always the same, whether he was addressing the Duma, armies marching into action, or a handful of peasants: he was about to die for Russia. Then suddenly Trotzky and Lenine came. They were men who did things; they overthrew his government. Worse, still, they refused to fulfill his prophecies; instead of executing him, they bundled him into exile. To be forced to live, when he had pledged himself to die, was a more cruel crucifixion than any he had anticipated. He found himself nailed to the cross of ridicule with no one to applaud his sacrifice. He was left with nothing to talk about, for the thing he had talked about had not happened. He was an idealist, an inspirer, a prophet, but because death had avoided him, there was no gospel to write. Having climbed the long

HE BECOMES PART OF THE GAME 147

road to Calvary, he had the tragedy to survive. Don't think I'm belittling him. I loved him. It was a proud, but not an easy task to be the wife of a man who wanted to be like Christ."

She collapsed into silence, sitting lost in thought, her arms hanging limply by her sides. He wondered what pictures she was seeing in the fire—armed men marching, revolution, palaces going up in flame.

Of course he remembered the Varensky she had described—the Varensky who, in the darkest hour of the war, had hurled himself like a knight-errant to the rescue of the Allies. It was he who was to have consolidated Russia, leading its millions in an endless tide to the defeat of the enemies of righteousness. It was freedom he had promised; freedom to everybody. He had preached that every man was good in himself, that the things that made men bad were laws. Therefore he had swept all laws aside. He had done away with compulsion, repealed death penalties, thrown prisons wide. For a day and night he had held the stage, a shining figure, adored by despairing eyes. Then the slaves whom he had released from restraints had surged over him. He had vanished, trampled beneath ungrateful feet, and Russia had become a mob.

So this was Varensky's wife! He felt awed. The romantic heroism of her husband's failure clothed her with a wistful sacredness. Three years ago he could not have approached her. He would scarcely have dared to have regarded her as a woman. The hysteria of the moment had canonized her. Streets

through which she drove in Petrograd had been lined with kneeling throngs. There had been something medieval in the spontaneity of her worship. It had been rumored that she was a bride immaculate; that her purity was the secret of her husband's strength. Her face made the story credible. It had the virgin innocence of a saint's. And here he was allowed to sit beside her, with three years gone, sharing her hearth in this obscure place of hiding!

"You were a Russian Joan of Arc," he declared enthusiastically. "How well I remember all the legends one read about you. And Varensky—— It doesn't matter that he failed; his was the most gallant figure of the entire war. When every nation was embittered, he set us an example of how not to hate. He refused to kill, when all of us were slaying. He had the courage of meekness; in that at least he followed Christ. What became of him? There was a report——"

"There have been many reports," she interrupted sadly. "Lest the latest be true, I wear mourning. I wear mourning for him always. Before his fall I was his perpetual bride; since his fall I am his perpetual widow. He wishes to be dead, so to please him——"

"Then he's still alive?" Immediately he was conscious of the indecency of his disappointment.

She gazed into the darkness with a mild surprise. "I do not know. I never know. That's the torture of it. He was always less a man than a spirit. I begin to think he can not die."

HE BECOMES PART OF THE GAME 149

"You want him——?"

If she had heard his uncompleted question, she ignored it. With folded hands she stared into the red heart of the fire. Behind her, across the walls and ceiling as flames leaped and flickered, shadows took fantastic shapes. When she spoke, as though she were talking to herself, her words came softly.

"He was such a child—so dear, so vain, so intense, so sensitive. Why did he marry me, if it was only to resign me? He treated me as he treated Russia. We were both waiting for him to take us in his arms. But it was always ideals—things one can't embrace—that drew out his affections. Had he loved humanity less and individuals more, he could have gone so far. There was something monstrous about his self-abnegations. Perhaps he denied himself the things for which he did not care. He wanted to seem nobler than any one else. Through egotism he missed his chance. Had he planned to live, he could have killed his enemies and prevented revolution. There was a time when he could have crushed both Lenine and Trotzky. But he had to be too noble. 'No,' he said, 'if their ideal is more right than mine, it will conquer. Truth can not be silenced by slaughter.' It was his inhuman magnanimity that defeated him. So Lenine and Trotzky grew strong and crushed him. Because he had planned to die, millions are starving, and Russia is in chaos."

"But he doesn't own it?"

"In his heart—yes. Like a General who has

blundered, the vision of lost battlefields is forever in his eyes—the forests of white crosses! His egotism is gone. He wants to make atonement; to perish seems the only way. Any one who would delay him, even though she were a woman who loved him, is his enemy. In his remorse he hounds death as other men avoid it. He's head of the counter-revolution and goes continually into Russia for the overthrow of Bolshevism. Not that he hopes for success, but that he may be put against a wall and shot."

"And always he returns?"

"Always until this last time."

Her voice sank away in a whisper. He eyed her with misgiving. What was it she desired?

"I read something of this. He's been missing for a long time?"

"A long time."

Coming out of the shadows, so that she could see his face, he drew his chair close to hers.

"And what has this to do with your confession?"

V

She flinched, as though he had made a motion to strike her. "My confession! Ah, yes! I forgot."

She tried to smile. Stretching out her hand, she touched him in a timid appeal for understanding. Taking it between his own he held it fast.

"Like that," he said, "as though it were a bird

HE BECOMES PART OF THE GAME 151

that's tired. It isn't its own nest, but it's safe and warm; let it rest till it grows stronger."

"You're good," she faltered. "Most good men are hard."

"Maybe," he laughed. "But I'm not good. On the other hand, I don't suppose I'm bad. I'm simply a man who's always had to fight, so I know what it's like to be up against it. You're up against it at present. You can see nothing before you but a high stone wall with no way round it. I've been there, and I've found that when you can't get round a wall, there's usually a door. What do you say? Shall we look for a door together?"

"I have." She sank her head. "Every day and night in three interminable years I've looked for it. I'm like a person lost in a fog, standing still, listening, running, falling."

"Scared to death?"

She nodded.

"Then don't be scared; stop running. Wait for your fear to catch up with you. If you face it, it'll shrink to nothing. The feet of a pursuer are like an army. What's causing your panic? Varcensky? The thought that he may not return?"

"No."

"That he may?"

"No."

"Then?"

"That he may go on wasting me forever."

She waited for him to say something. When he remained silent, she bent forward staring vacantly

into the hearth. "Perhaps I'm a coward and unfaithful. Perhaps if he'd been successful—— I know what he thinks of me: that I'm a fair-weather wife. But I'm not. If it would help him, I'd give my life for him. He doesn't want my life. He doesn't want my body. He wants the one thing that I can't give him—that I should believe in him. There are people who still believe in him—the Little Grandmother. There are others, like Prince Rogovich, who pretended to believe in him that he might use him as a cat's-paw. He says good-by to me for the last time and vanishes. I wait in retirement for news of his execution. At the end of two months, three months, half a year, he comes back. Then the rehearsing for his martyrdom commences all afresh. If there were anything I could do! But to be wasted for no purpose!"

She turned her head wearily, glancing at him sideways. "You called me the Joan of Russia. I was almost. There was a time when not to be loved and not to be a mother seemed a small price to pay for sainthood. It was my happiness against the happiness of millions. But now——" Her eyes filmed over.

"But now——?" he prompted.

She brushed her tears away with pitiful defiance. "I want to be a woman—to be everything in some man's life."

"Perhaps you are in his, but he doesn't show it."

She seemed to listen for laughter. Then, "No,"

HE BECOMES PART OF THE GAME 153

she said. "When I try to be a woman, I play Satan to him."

"And that's the wall?"

"Not all of it. There's Santa."

In the swift march of his emotions he had almost forgotten Santa. As though she had been drowning and he had turned back from rescuing her, the mention of her name stung him with reproach.

"What of Santa?" he asked in a low voice.

VI

"She's in love with my husband."

He let go her hand. "Do you mind if I smoke? Perhaps you'll join me? No?"

He took his time while he lit his cigarette. Then, speaking slowly, "I can't believe all the evil that I've heard about this woman. And yet I ought. Every fresh person has told me something increasingly vile. To make a case against her, I have only to take all the trouble she's caused me. I meet her on a liner and part with her on landing; from that moment I have no peace. I'm pestered by strangers accusing and defending her. My room is entered by spies. I find an anonymous note pinned to my pillow. I'm lured out of London into the heart of the country on the pretext that she's in danger and I can help her. You know the rest. Until the happenings of tonight, the most probable explanation seemed to be that she had taken a secret fancy to me and had

turned to me in her distress, when she found herself suspected of a crime. That theory won't hold water any longer."

"It might."

"It couldn't. You tell me she's in love with your husband."

"Santa can be in love with as many men as serve her purpose. The only loyalty to which she's constant is the memory of her dead child."

He shook himself irritably. "Nothing that you or any one has told me explains her. She left on me an impression of nobility which absolutely contradicts all this later information. Until I met you, it almost seemed there was a conspiracy on foot to poison my mind. What she is said to have done may all be true, but I can't help searching behind her actions for a higher motive. You'd clear matters up if you'd tell me frankly how it is that you come into the picture."

"The picture!" She shrank back from him like a timid child.

Controlling himself, he spoke patiently. "Do I need to be explicit? You ought to hate her. She's in love with your husband. When, a few hours ago, it was a case of warning her of the trap she was walking into, you were reluctant to give the signal. 'She wouldn't spare us,' you said; 'so why should you and I——?' And yet you're her accomplice. It was you whom I followed. It was you who, when you'd got me into this room, tried to hold me at the revolver's point."

HE BECOMES PART OF THE GAME 155

She buried her face in the hollow of her arm. Her voice came muffled. "It was I."

He waited for her to say more. She made no sound—not even of sobbing.

"It was a dangerous game to play," he reminded her. "You didn't know your man or how he would take it. You must have had some strong motive. You might have killed me without even intending. What a risk you ran, doing a thing like that single-handed! For a moment, when I first entered, everything was touch and go."

And still she made no reply.

The fire had burned low. He emptied coals on it. To bridge the embarrassment of her silence, he went over to the window, pulling aside the curtains, and stood gazing out at the glory of the night. The moon rode high. Trees were clumped and motionless. The crooning of waves made a continual lullaby.

She was married, and she was wasted. She was not wanted, and she was not released. She had a husband who refused to live and could not contrive to die. As a substitute for passion she had tried sainthood; it had not satisfied.

He let the curtains fall. Turning, he gazed back at the black-garbed figure bowed in the half-circle of firelight. Her golden hair had broken loose. It poured across her shoulders and gathered at her feet in a pool. At the moment she looked more a Magdalene than a saint. And this was the woman

who had made men brave by her purity—to whom a nation had turned in its agony!

A flood of pity swept over him. Poor, narrow shoulders to have borne such a burden! Poor, virgin feet to have come so long a journey! Poor, mortal hands to have given such a blessing! She had been robbed and cast aside.

The cruelty of idealists! She was their victim. What did they attain? Idealists slew happiness on the altar of dreams that a future happiness might result from it. Though their dreams were mistaken, they lost nothing; they snatched their sensation of godlike righteousness. But who could restore the happiness of others which their frenzy had destroyed?

If this time Varensky had had the decency to die, she was free. He himself could take her. But would she want him? He had no attractions. All that he could offer would be to serve her. He couldn't place her back on her pinnacle of fame. Instead of crowds, he would be her only worshiper. Would that satisfy a woman who had been a saint for a day? He could promise her rest and protection. He could take her feet in his hands and guide them over rough places. And if she wanted to be a woman——

Crossing the room on tiptoe, he stood over her. Sinking to his knee, he placed a hand on her shoulder.

"Won't you look up? I'm not here to hurt you. I wouldn't even judge you. Life's been hard."

When she gave no sign, he spoke again.

HE BECOMES PART OF THE GAME 157

"I'm a man and a stranger. You're a wife. But you've told me so much. You're wounded. You can't go on by yourself."

She moved. He knew now that she was listening.

"There's that door in the wall we were going to find. Perhaps we've found it. Let me be your friend. It would be foolish and wrong for me to tell you that I——"

She raised her head. Her hair fell back, and her eyes gazed out at him with hungry intensity. "Don't say it," she implored. "Varensky——"

"But if he's dead? If I can bring you sure proof?"

For answer she pressed his hand against her bosom.

VII

He seated himself at her feet, his arms clasped about his knees as if crouched before a camp-fire. How much meaning had she read into his implied confession? He felt happy; happier than ever before in his life, and yet, if she were the cause of his happiness, the odds were all against him. She had promised him nothing. She could promise him nothing. All he knew of her was what she had told him. His elation might prove to be no more than an emotion that would fade in the chill light of morning.

"It would be foolish and wrong for me to tell you——" The words had risen to his lips unpremeditated. He had not realized that he cared for

her until they were uttered. He had merely felt an immense compassion, an overwhelming desire to comfort her. That he should care for her at all was preposterous. It was paying her no compliment. Love that was worth the having required a more permanent incentive than physical beauty. Her mind and her character were a riddle to him. If his passion was no passing mood and she were indeed a widow, it would be her mind and her character that he might one day marry. He ought to have foreseen that something of this sort would be sure to happen between a man and woman left alone after midnight.

But the triumphant self whom she had roused in him grinned impudently at this cautious moralizing. He gloried in the magnificent unwisdom of his indiscretion. He was surprised and delighted at this newly-discovered capacity for recklessness. When experience was growing stale, he had broken through limitations and found himself gazing on an unguessed landscape where adventure commenced afresh. He could still feel the softness of her flesh against his hand. That sudden act of tenderness had altered all their relations.

He glanced up at her shyly. She, too, was dreaming. Her lips were smiling uncertainly; there was a far-away, brooding expression in her eyes. The blackness of her mourning merged with the shadows, making her seem disembodied; all he could see distinctly was the golden torrent of her hair framing the pallor of her face.

HE BECOMES PART OF THE GAME 159

"They knelt to you in Petrograd. I don't wonder."

"Poor people! It did them no good. I never want any one else to do it."

"But I kneel to you. I crouch at your feet."

"I would rather be loved than worshiped." She restrained him gently. "Not yet."

"Then, until I may love, I kneel to you."

"You ought to find me repellent. No, let me speak. I own to you that I'm married, and here I sit with you alone, not knowing whether my husband lives or is buried. I must be wicked—more wicked than I guessed. Ivan was right; he used to tell me I played Satan to him. These hands, which look so soft and white, are cruel. This face, which seems so gentle, is a lie. This hair, which makes a pillow for your head, is a snare. One good man has already cast me aside. Rather than love me, he preferred death. And you are good. How near I came to killing you!" She bent over him, taking his face between her hands. "You! Do you understand?"

She had drawn his head back against her knees. Her lips all but touched him. He could feel the fanning of her breath. Her voice came pantingly, as though she dreaded her own question: "What can you see in me?"

"Blue eyes, like a glimpse of heaven."

"Tell me truly."

"What can I see?" He stared up adoringly. "A woman who's still a child. A woman who's been cheated. A woman whose arms are empty. A

woman who sits outside a tomb, dreaming of life."

"Not of life," she corrected softly; "of being allowed to live for a man."

"For me, perhaps?"

She smiled vaguely.

"Without knowing what kind of a man I am?"

"Do you know me?" She sat upright, gazing straight before her. "You don't even know why I brought you."

"Why?"

"It seems strange to tell you now. It seems like a forgotten sadness, so forgotten that it might belong to some one else. And yet once it hurt. I brought you that I might win back my husband. Don't stiffen. Look up and see how I'm smiling. I was never his in your sense. I was an image in a niche, whose hands he kissed. I was a mascot, bringing him good luck. The woman part of me he postponed superstitiously till his cause should be won. It will never be won now."

"But he warned you before he married you?"

She shook her head. "He made sure of me. At first I was proud to be included in his sacrifice. Then failure made it all absurd. I was sorry for him. I knew only one way to comfort him. But because he had failed, he became the more determined to deny himself. Instead of comforting him, I became his tempter. Then Santa——"

Hindwood pulled himself together and bent forward, glowering into the fire. "I can't understand all this talk of sacrifice. It sounds so confoundedly

HE BECOMES PART OF THE GAME 161

unpractical. As far as I can make out, your husband's idea of virtue was to abstain from everything that makes life worth living. He didn't profit any one by abstaining. All he did was to narrow himself. If he'd wanted to be an ascetic, why couldn't he have done the thing thoroughly and played the game? There was no need to drag you into it."

"There was no need," she assented quietly, "but to have me and to withstand me made him appear more dedicated. He tantalized himself with the thought of me and used me as a knife with which to gash himself. I was a part of the road to Calvary he was treading in order that Russia might be saved. It gratified his pride to make the road spectacular. Then, when we were in exile and he was no longer a power, Santa came, the ruthless idealist—his very opposite."

"Ruthless, perhaps! But I shouldn't call her an idealist."

"She is—an idealist who, to gain her ends, stoops to any baseness. She's an avenging angel, beautiful and sinister. She's one of the few revolutionaries who knows what she wants; because she knows, she gets it. Varensky never knew. His head was in the clouds. He lost sight of his purpose in a mist of words."

"What does she want?" As he asked the question, he glanced back at her where she gleamed like a phantom.

"She wants——" There was a pause during which the only sound was the struggle of the distant

surf. "She wants to make men pay for what they do to children. All her crimes—— She's a mother, robbed of her young; in her own fierce way, she's taken all the children of the world to her breast."

"But men don't do anything."

She caught his tone of puzzlement. "Oh yes. Each generation commits ferocious sins against the coming generation that can't protect itself. It's children who pay for wars and every social injustice. Men live like a marauding army, pillaging the land between birth and death. They pass on and leave to children the settlement of their reckless debts. Take this latest war; five million children in Europe alone are dying of starvation at this moment. Santa's marked down the men who are responsible for their suffering; silently, one by one, she drags them with her beauty and exacts the penalty."

"Prince Rogovich?"

"Probably. He was raising funds for a new carnage."

"But where do I come in? You said that you'd brought me here to help you win your husband."

"She's in love with Ivan. To be loved by Santa is like witnessing the signature to one's death warrant. Perhaps she's a Bolshevik agent—the only people to whom the Bolsheviks are merciful are children. Perhaps she's really in love with him. She plays with him like a cat with a mouse."

"And he?"

"He's indifferent, as he is to every woman. Yet

HE BECOMES PART OF THE GAME 163

because she's treacherous and he wants to die, he takes her with him on many of his journeys. I hoped that if I could give you to her, she might spare him. That was before I knew you. I was beside myself with suspense. Ivan has been gone so long; to do her bidding seemed like giving him his last chance of life. She's in danger and in hiding. You're the one person who can prove her guilt. I thought that if I put you in her power, I'd place her under an obligation, so that——"

"And now?"

She covered her face with her hands. "God forgive me, it's your safety that counts—not Ivan's."

He knelt against her, plucking her hands aside. "Look at me," he commanded. "So long as your husband lives, his safety comes first. In saving me, you might betray him. If, in snatching our happiness, we connived at his death, his shadow would always stand between us. I'm still your prisoner; I've not taken back my parole. Here's your revolver." He drew it from his pocket and laid it on her knees. "Fulfill your bargain."

"How?"

"Take me to Santa."

"But Ivan—already he may be——"

"Until we know, we'll play the game by him." When she hesitated, he added, "I wouldn't be friends with any woman who couldn't be loyal."

Her hands groped after the revolver and found it. Forcing back her tears, she answered, "Nor would I with any man."

Rising to his feet, he helped her to rise. "Take me to her."

VIII

As they stepped into the garden, the first restlessness of morning was in the air. The moon had vanished. Stars were going out. Along the low level of sea-line dawn cast a sickly shadow. It was as though night were an indigo curtain behind which silver forms were moving.

She led the way across the lawn, through a door in the wall, and out on the short, crisp turf. She had thrown a cloak about her and pulled the hood over her head. It made her look cowed and elfin. It was the hour when everything is fantastic.

He had an oppressive sense of unreality, as though this were all a dream from which he would shortly rouse. He stood aloof from recent happenings and surveyed his share in them in an elderly, derisive fashion. What were all these promises that he had been exchanging like a gallant? He tried to recall his exact words. To what extent had he committed himself? He had crossed the Atlantic that he might multiply his fortune—for no other reason. He was neither an idealist nor a sentimentalist; he had realized the chance that a bankrupt Europe offered and had come to take advantage of it. What would these derelicts of the catastrophe think of him if they guessed his real purpose? They

HE BECOMES PART OF THE GAME 165

were willfully, even contemptibly, unpractical; yet their perverted unselfishness troubled his conscience. To spend half one's years in exile, like the Little Grandmother, might not correct injustice, but at least it was a brave protest. To plan to die, like Varensky, because he had failed to rescue humanity, was a counsel of despair, but it had its gleam of nobility. To assassinate, like Santa, men whose statesmanship you did not comprehend was the madness of a zealot, but she at least staked her life against theirs. Into none of these undertakings did profit enter. It was disquieting to find himself among people so determined to convert the world to altruism. The world had been like this always; it would be like this to the end. If they were once to sense who he was, they would regard him as their enemy. He was walking into danger with his eyes wide open. His wisest plan would be to sink into the shadows and take the first train back to sanity. To do that he would have to leave her.

And why not? What did he owe her? What was she to him? She belonged to another man. Waiting for him to die, or to make sure of his death, might prove a tedious business—a humiliating one, most certainly. And yet to leave her now——

She had been going on ahead—or was it his steps that had been lagging? She had halted. As he came up, he felt the firm surface of the road beneath his tread.

In the gloom she laid her hand on his arm. "If you've promised too much——"

That determined him. "I keep my promises," he answered shortly.

Walking side by side, they struggled on against the mass of all-surrounding vagueness. It seemed like a strong, gray tide pressing on their breasts, against which they made no headway.

What was to be the upshot of it? She was guiding him to Santa. His lips twisted. It would take more than Santa to inspire him with terror. England wasn't the jungle. A man couldn't disappear unnoticed. Supposing in the next half-hour Santa were to do away with him, what would she gain by it? She would have silenced his testimony in the Rogovich affair, but she would have added to the evidence. If she were the woman she was painted, she would be too wary to do that. No, she would not attempt to kill him. Then what was her urgency?

Gradually night was fading. The paleness from the sea was spreading. It drove like smoke, in billowy banks of vapor, creeping low along the ground. Live things were waking. In separate, plaintive warnings, early-risen birds were calling. Across the road ahead rabbits scurried. Against the formless vacancy of sky the rounded shoulders of the uplands became discernible. He took notice of their direction. She was leading him to the abandoned camp.

"Madame Varensky."

She started. "Not that."

"I'm sorry. It was the only name I knew to call you. What do they usually——?"

"Anna."

HE BECOMES PART OF THE GAME 167

She came close like a child and stood gazing up at him.

He stooped and spoke gently. "You're a wild rose. Once more let me look into your eyes. It's so strange that you should care for me."

"More strange to me," she said.

He placed his hands on her shoulders. "There's something that I want you to remember. If harm comes to either of us, believe always that it was only good that I intended."

"Whatever you brought me would be good," she murmured.

"I wish it might." He tumbled the hood back so that he could see her hair. "When a man loves a woman who's already married, it doesn't often bring happiness. It wouldn't be right that it should. It isn't our fault that this has happened, but it will be if we misuse it."

"We shan't misuse it."

"There's something else." He groped after his words. "Before I came to you, I'd been foolish. There's no sense in regretting; if I hadn't been foolish, we shouldn't have met. I thought that I was following Santa; you can guess——"

She inclined her head.

"And there's one thing more. If your husband comes back, promise me you'll forget."

She strained against him, so their lips were nearly touching. "Never." She spoke fiercely. And again, "Never. Though it's years and you forget."

His hands slipped from her shoulders, lower and

lower, till his arms closed about her. "Rest," he whispered, "if it's only for a moment, poor, tired little bird."

Through the ghostly twilight of the autumn dawn they entered the deserted camp. Before one of the hutments she halted and tapped. She tapped again. There was no answer. Cautiously raising the latch, she peered into the room. Beckoning to him, she slipped across the threshold.

IX

The hut was empty. The floor was deep in dust. The ceiling was meshed with cobwebs. Nailed across the window, just as the soldiers had left it, a dingy curtain hung. Striking a match, he held it above his head. At the far end he made out signs of occupancy. On a shelf was a loaf of bread and near by a pitcher. In a corner, spread on the bare boards for a bed, was a wrap. He stooped; it was Santa's cloak of sables.

The match went out. He turned. "How long has she been here?"

"From the time she knew she was suspected."

"She knew she was suspected at Plymouth. What made her motor all across England to this?" He glanced round with pity at the poverty-stricken forlornness.

"She wanted to be near."

"What? It would be better to tell me."

HE BECOMES PART OF THE GAME 169

"To the road out."

He lit a cigarette and considered. "So there are more people in it," he said at last, "than just the few that I have met! It's an organization. I might have guessed. There are the people who helped the little old lady to visit me undetected. There are the people who entered my room in my absence. There's the foreign gentleman, who couldn't speak English, who called for Santa in his car. But if this hut is on the road out, why was she delaying?"

"For you, perhaps."

"But she was risking her freedom every second. Why for me, Anna?"

Before he had given her time to answer, his mind had leaped to a new conjecture. "What if she's captured?"

Suddenly the tragedy of this strange woman, temple-dancer, revolutionary, avenger of children, became vivid. Her pain stung him as though he had suffered it himself. He lived again the hunted hours that must have been hers while she had listened in this dusty room. He remembered her fascination, the grayness of her eyes, the fastidiousness of her dress. What a contrast to these surroundings! How often she must have crouched by that window, watching from behind the shabby curtain for the approach of the pursuer! The men she had killed did not matter. Probably they had deserved their death. His pity was reserved for her. She had been the pampered darling of princes. Her whims had been commands to lovers who themselves were rulers.

No present had been too costly to purchase the ecstasy of her complaisance. Her body had been a jewel, guarded, coveted, irrepeatable in its beauty. Crimes had been committed for its possession. And this was her end! He heard in memory the hoarse pleading of her voice, trying vainly to convince him that love could make her good.

The woman at his side was speaking. "We heard no sound. She was armed. If they'd tried to take her, she'd have defended herself."

His thoughts came back. "Last night. Yes. If they'd taken her in the garden. But they might have known she would be armed. Perhaps they followed her. If they traced her to this hut, they might have waited till she was sleeping——"

She shook her head. "It isn't that. She's grown tired of delaying. She's gone by the road out."

He frowned. "That's the second time you've used the phrase. Can't you tell me plainly?"

"If it's not too late, I'll show you."

She darted out of the hut. When he joined her in the open, she was waiting impatiently to secure the door behind him. The moment it was fastened, she set off at a run. She raced like a boy, with none of a woman's awkwardness. With an occasional backward glance, up the long deserted avenue of the camp she fled. At first he was content to follow for the pleasure he had in watching her. She was so swift and young. She was like a deer in her slenderness. Sudden eagerness had transformed her. The

HE BECOMES PART OF THE GAME 171

hood had slipped back to her shoulders; the wind of her going fluttered in her hair.

Outside the camp she bore to the left in a direction leading further afield. Over gorse and bracken dew had flung a silver net. The turf was a tapestry sewn with jewels. Larks were springing up. The keen fragrance of seaweed mingled with the honeyed perfumes of the land.

He caught up with her. "Why?" he panted.

She had no breath to waste in words. Turning on him a flushed and laughing face, she pointed ahead.

Just short of the cliff-edge, where the sheer drop began, she sank to her knees, clasping her breast. While she recovered, he gazed about him. He discovered no sign of the thing she was pursuing. The sea was blanketed in mist. Above the blurred horizon, the red eye of the sun stared at him. From the foot of the cliff came the lapping of waves. No other sound.

She had risen. He was about to speak. She pressed a finger to her lips. Taking him by the hand, she led him to the edge.

At first, as he gazed down, he saw only the crumbling face of the chalk. Then he made out a winding path descending; it seemed no broader than a track that a goat might follow.

"What is it?"

"Listen."

She dragged excitedly on his arm.

Distinctly, above the lapping of waves, he heard the click of oars working in oar-locks. Beneath the

fog a vessel was hiding. It had dropped a boat which was pulling toward the land.

"The road out," she whispered.

"But Santa——"

She nodded. "It's not so difficult as it looks. It was used by smugglers. We use it——"

She broke off. Oars were being shipped. The prow grounded. There was a muttering of men's voices. Some sort of discussion. A pause. Then oars were put out again. The rowing recommenced, growing fainter and fainter.

X

"Gone!"

She pressed against him in her gladness.

Seeing the relief in her eyes, he questioned, "What does this mean to you, Anna?"

"Safety."

"Anything else?"

"Freedom, perhaps."

"You mean you think that Santa had received word of your husband and that that was why——?"

"I don't want to think or mean; I only want to feel. It's as though I'd been living in a prison and the door had been flung wide. I wasn't one of them. They condemned me. In their hearts they despised me. I was too weak. I couldn't bear their cross." She clenched her hands against her cheeks till the knuckles showed white. "What's the good of being

crucified? It's so much better to live and be glad for people."

"And Santa," he asked, "where she's going, what will happen to her?"

She raised her face. "Pain. She'll be hounded and hunted. She's getting too well known. Prince Rogovich thought he recognized her. She'll be always escaping, rushing from hiding to hiding, till one day—— To have been loved so much and to be pushed out of life——"

Behind the mist they heard the creak of ropes running over pulleys. A gasoline engine was started. For an instant the shadow of a trawler loomed through the wall of opaqueness. The tiller was thrust over. She vanished. They stood very silently, listening and watching. In imagination Hindwood followed the vessel's course. It was not of the vessel he was thinking, but of the woman on board her. "To have been loved so much and to be pushed out of life——" If he had had the chance, what could he have done for her? She had fascinated him; but he had not loved her. She was past reclaiming. Love with a woman of her kind would have meant passion—nothing more. A fierce flame, self-consuming! A slow degrading of an emotion that was fine! Yet he was filled with pity and unreasoning remorse. Some day her enemies would overtake her—good, respectable men like Major Cleasby; the good men who by the injustice of their prejudices had made her what she was.

"It's a chapter ended," he said quietly.

Slipping his arm through hers, as though she already belonged to him, he was turning inland toward the peace of the rolling country, when his step was arrested. He caught the sound of labored breathing and the rattle of sliding chalk. Hands groped above the edge of the cliff, searching for a holding. They were followed by the head and shoulders of a man with a face intensely white, in which a pair of pale green eyes smoldered. Lower down and out of sight a woman spoke. The voice was Santa's.

CHAPTER THE FIFTH

THE GREEN EYES CAST A SPELL

I

HINDWOOD stood rooted to the ground. He had thrust Anna behind him. She was tugging at his hand with the tenacity of terror. He scarcely dared breathe while he watched the green-eyed man dragging himself inch by inch to safety. To go to his assistance might cause his death. Any move that startled him might fling him back over the precipice. In falling he would sweep away the unseen woman who must be clinging to the face of the cliff below him.

To Hindwood it seemed that he was present at a fantastic rehearsal of the Day of Resurrection. When the last trumpet blew, it would probably be precisely in some such fashion that the sea would give up its dead. It would happen about sunrise, when mankind was still abed. It would commence very quietly, when clouds were hanging low and the first of the barnyard cocks were crowing. Without warning, graves would open, and all the tired people, who had been so long resting, would begin to stir. Like the sound of falling rain, they would patter through the drowsing country, searching for their

ancient dwellings. At first they would walk alone, then in groups, later in crowds. By the time the living looked out of their windows there would be no standing room on earth. Across seas and oceans the drowned would come swimming. They would wade through waves and clamber up cliffs, just as this man was doing.

The vision became so probable that Hindwood glanced behind him to make sure that it was not happening. In a shimmering expanse of dew and autumn coloring lay the sweet, green landscape of living men, the kindly hedgerows, the sheltering valleys, the friendly villages. Everything was gentle and unaltered. It was only at this barrier, which the green-eyed stranger was struggling to surmount, that the tranquillity ended. At its brink eternity commenced, a pulsating oblivion of mist and grayness across which the rising sun peered curiously.

The stranger was too occupied with his danger to be aware that he was being observed. Clutching at tufts and digging with his fingers, he was easing himself out of the abyss. Little by little he was gaining ground till at last, pulling his knees clear of the edge, he sprawled exhausted on the turf. But it was only for a moment. Twisting about, still lying flat, he reached down to his companion. As she appeared, he retreated, steadying her efforts and dragging her with him. Side by side they collapsed, breathing heavily and staring in dazed defiance at the death they had avoided.

Hindwood made a step to approach them. He

THE GREEN EYES CAST A SPELL 177

found himself tethered. Anna was gazing up at him, silently imploring. Her hair seemed a mass of solid gold, weighing her down. The blue veins in her temples stood out beneath her fairness. Her throat was milk-white and stretched back. Her lips were parted, revealing the coral of her mouth. It was as though she had been caught from behind by an assailant and brutally jerked back. With little endearing motions she caressed Hindwood's hand. He tried to fathom her necessity; in the presence of her weakness there was nothing that he would not have granted.

The man with the green eyes had recovered. In the act of rising he had caught sight of them. His jaw had dropped open. If it was possible, his complexion had gone a shade whiter. His expression bore testimony to the medley of his emotions, the chief of which was astonishment. He made an oddly pathetic figure, with his scratched hands and torn clothing, crouching in that hunted attitude. He had lost his hat in the ascent. His brown hair was lank with perspiration. He was a lean man and graceful as a greyhound. Even in his present ungainly posture there was a hint of something swift and gallant in his bearing. One forgot that he was a vagabond who had eluded formalities and completed an illegal landing; he looked more like a champion unhorsed in a tourney. His brow was wide and noble, but the top of his head was shaped like a deformity and rose into a point like a dunce's cap. His eyes were well-spaced and piercing; they penetrated with

a sense of power. His mouth was thin-lipped and sensitive—too sensitive for a man's. His face was narrow and smooth as a girl's. He had a haggard appearance of perpetual suffering, which the extremeness of his pallor served to enhance. He was indefinitely tragic. He might have sat equally well for a portrait of Lucifer or of Harlequin overtaken by his folly.

Very wearily he lifted himself from the ground and stumbled toward them. As he did so, Santa uttered a nervous cry and turned—after which she watched broodingly what happened.

Paying no attention to Hindwood, the man made straight for Anna. Bending over her humbly, he whispered unintelligible words. Her terror left her. Making no sound, she raised to him eyes eloquent with compassion.

“What did he say?” Hindwood questioned.

She was prepared to reply, when the stranger stayed her with a gesture. “I was apologizing in Russian for having returned.”

Hindwood glanced at the ragged edge of the cliff and shrugged his shoulders. “An apology's scarcely necessary. You're to be congratulated. You seem to have recognized this lady. Who are you?”

The stranger drew himself erect. A grim smile played about his mouth. “Ivan Varensky, at your service.”





ATTEMPT 1

II

Hindwood stared at him with a frown. He was contrasting this Ivan Varensky with the leader of men whose deeds of three years ago had so deeply stirred him. One picture stood out ineffaceably. It was of a sea of panic-stricken soldiers, patriotism forgotten, arms flung away, in wild retreat, and of Ivan Varensky driving forward alone, as though he, by his single courage, could turn back the enemy. And this was the man—the white knight of Russia, the scape-goat, the magician of words! Had he met him three years ago, he would have knelt to him. Now all he could do was to frown.

It was necessary to say something. He spoke gruffly. "You've chosen an odd method of returning. We had news you were dead."

"I was," the green eyes narrowed, "nearly. I'm always nearly dying. Isn't that so, Anna? And then I come back. This last time, as you observed, I had the discourtesy to forget. I was thinking of Santa. Actually I struggled to survive. Believe me, that's unlike me."

The forbearance of his manner was rebuking. Making an effort to be genial, Hindwood held out his hand. "It's a strange way to meet. I've long been your admirer. It was a close call—as close as a man could have."

Varensky winced as the powerful grip closed about

his fingers. They were long and pointed, more like a woman's than a man's. "A close call!" He smiled. "You're American? It wasn't—not for me. I could tell you— But perhaps one day, when I've become past history, Anna will do that."

As he mentioned his wife, he gave her a look at once tender and furtive—a look which acknowledged without rancor the truth of the situation. She started forward, but his eyes held her. She stopped half-way.

"However you return," she said chokingly, "and however often, you know that I'm glad. It's the certainty that I shall lose you—that however often you return I shall never have you—"

She bowed her head. From the edge of the cliff, without a trace of emotion, the other woman watched her.

Tilting her face with his bruised fingers, Varensky regarded her earnestly. "As if I wasn't aware of that!" And then, "Let's be going."

Side by side, but always separate, they moved across the downs. There was no backward glance. Hindwood followed them with his eyes till they sank into a hollow. The last he saw was the raw gold of her hair and the conical top of his pointed head, growing more distant above the bracken.

III

"And I, too, have to apologize. I failed to keep my appointment."

THE GREEN EYES CAST A SPELL 181

He swung round at the mockingly spoken words, to find that Santa had stolen up behind him. Until now he had had no time to notice her. His anger was so intense that it held him silent. After all that she had done and had intended to do to him, she had the effrontery to jest! Did she think that he was as much her dupe as the fool who had died for her in the woods of Vincennes?

But his anger was short-lived and left him sternly cold. She was changed. Her fastidious elegance was a thing of the past. She was commonly attired as any fisher-girl. Her cheap blouse was rent at the neck; its sleeves were stained and in tatters. Her rough skirt had been nearly trodden off. She was torn and disheveled. She had suffered even more from her adventure than had Varensky. Her hat lay crushed at her feet in the grass. With her wounded hands she was doing her best to twine the thick coils of her hair into place. She stood confessed for what she was, a fugitive from justice. The wildness of the landscape made a fitting setting. She looked startlingly untamed. She might have passed for a peasant Ophelia, except that her gray eyes were calm and her manner nonchalant.

"There are a good many things, besides missing your appointment, for which you have to apologize."

"I can explain—"

He cut her short. "Between you and me no explanations are necessary."

She jerked back her head, flattening her hands

against her sides like a soldier standing at attention. "Why not?"

He took his time to answer. "Because you're nothing to me."

Her face went white, then flamed scarlet, as though he had struck her with his open palm. "Nothing to you!" She spoke slowly. "I, Santa Gorlof, am nothing to you! You're the first man to whom I ever offered my heart. I would lie down in the mud that you might walk over me. I'd let you beat me like a dog if I might only follow you. I'd starve that you might be fed, go thirsty that you might drink, break my body that you might not suffer. I would die if it would give you pleasure." Seeing that her rhetoric was having no effect, she sank her voice. "When I could have escaped, I waited for you. I risked my freedom for one last sight of you." She clutched at her breast, choking down a sob. "And you tell me that I'm nothing to you!"

He was determined to remain unmoved by her emotion. Regarding her stonily, he asked: "What right had you to believe that you were anything to me?"

She laughed forlornly. "No right at all."

"If I had ever cared for you," he continued, "in your present predicament it would all be ended."

She raised her brows contemptuously. "Of course."

"You see, I've found out the sort of woman you are."

"What sort?"

THE GREEN EYES CAST A SPELL 183

"Need I recall?"

He turned away, searching hollows and clumps of bushes for bobbing heads of watchers. Her captors might be closing in on her. Her indifference to her danger was disconcerting. With eyes still fixed on the distant landscape, he revealed his thoughts.

"Your talk of love is paltry. It's tragic farce. You have a husband. You're liable to be jailed at any moment."

He expected she would retort. When she maintained silence, he glanced down at his feet, ashamed of what he felt himself compelled to tell her.

"Love! If it were true, and if your affection were desired, you have no love to offer. Nothing that is you is yours. Your hours are numbered. Your body and your life are forfeit. The man who is your husband is leading the hue-and-cry against you. If you think you can persuade me to go to the scaffold for you, rid yourself of the thought. There'll be no repetition of the woods of Vincennes. The victim in that case was your lover; I'm not." He met her eyes. "You never deceived me for a second. From the moment we left the *Ryndam*, I knew who it was had pushed Prince Rogovich overboard."

"If you knew," she asked quietly, "why didn't you have me arrested?"

"It was none of my business."

"But you were kind after we'd landed. At the hotel you arranged to breakfast with me."

"I couldn't bring myself to believe you were guilty."

"And yet, after you had believed, you followed me to Seafold."

"The detective instinct." He spoke testily. "Morbid curiosity."

"No." She said it wistfully. Her face softened. "You followed me because, even against your will, you still cared for me. You pitied me. You were chivalrous. You refused to condemn me unheard. You hoped there was some mistake. You followed me to make sure."

"And you've made me sure." He rapped out the words. "Since you insist on the truth, I came to Seafold hoping to find you innocent. If I had I should have fought for you. Whereas—"

"Whereas?" she prompted nervously.

"I found you'd done to me what you've done to every other man who ever befriended you—betrayed me and had me lured into an ambush where, for all I know, you'd given orders for me to be shot."

"But you weren't."

"No thanks to you. Your husband was ahead of you, hidden in the bushes, waiting for you. If we hadn't given the signal that warned you—"

"But you gave it." She spoke triumphantly. "I'd trapped you, and yet you didn't want me to be caught. To have shown generosity at a moment when you thought that I was threatening your life, you must still have been fond of me."

"Thought!" He drew back from her, revolted by her insincerity. "You left no room for thought. You were diabolically explicit. You knew that I

THE GREEN EYES CAST A SPELL 185

could prove your guilt. You meant to kill me in order that I might be silenced."

Her eyes filled. She stretched out her arms beseechingly. They fell hopelessly as he retreated from her.

"Don't misjudge me," she implored. "I'm a woman who's finished. A woman, as you reminded me, whose hours are numbered—my body and my life are forfeit. It's true what you said: nothing that I am belongs to me. If you like to put it that way, I'm a woman who has nothing to offer. And yet I love you—the first man with whom I was ever in love, now when it's too late. You don't believe me; you're thinking of the many others. Let it pass. I had to see you once more. I couldn't come to you; you were surrounded by my enemies. To persuade you to come to me, I had to trick you. Until it was safe to visit you, I had to have you held by force. I compelled Anna, Madame Varensky to—"

He made an impatient gesture. "Enough! I'm wondering to how many men you've made that speech before. I've heard all about your appeals to chivalry. If you were a man— Unfortunately you're not, so I have a sentimental compunction about abandoning you. What are your plans? When I saw the ship I hoped you had escaped."

"I had."

"And you came back! Why?"

"Varensky was landing from the boat that had been sent to take me off." She was laying claim to

some obscure nobility, making a final bid for his admiration.

"The mist's clearing," he said brusquely. "In another half-hour you'll be visible for miles. If you're seen here, you'll be taken."

"I won't."

"You think not?"

She smiled languidly. It was her arch, mysterious way of smiling that had first attracted him. "Why don't you go?" she whispered in her hoarse, parched voice. "You loathe and despise me. You grudge me every moment we're together. I've done what was right; I'm willing to pay the penalty. I've earned a rest. I'm tired—you can't guess how tired."

Now that she wanted him to go, he gazed at her with a new interest. If the trackers were hot upon his trail, what would be his sensations? Would he be able to be courteous and to talk calmly? Whatever might be her crimes, she had courage. What if it were true that by some tortuous process of reasoning she did actually believe she had done right? And what if it were true that she had intended him no harm, but had only attempted to win him by violence? The uneasy doubt took shape in his mind that he might have misjudged her. It would be a splendid memory to have, if she were wrongly executed—this gleaming morning, the larks singing, the blue-patched sky, the valiant sun, the rosy-tinted dew, and himself fleeing from the forlornness of a woman! Every man's hand was against her. She believed she had done right.

THE GREEN EYES CAST A SPELL 187

He regarded her less coldly. She was perfect as on the day when all Europe had gone wild over her. And this masterpiece of loveliness, which had been known as Santa Gorlof, was doomed to be destroyed!

"Go." She stamped her foot hysterically. "You torture me."

He faced her obstinately. "What are you proposing? You've some plan in mind. Madame Varensky called this 'the road out.' Is it possible for you to take it?"

"I know a shorter route."

"You're certain?"

"Please leave me. You must leave me. I'm a woman who has nothing to offer. You're a man who has everything to lose."

He squared his lips. "I don't like the sound of this shorter route. I want to know more about it."

As he made a step toward her, she dodged and broke from him, dashing toward the cliff. On the very edge he caught her. She struggled dangerously, but he stumbled back with her crushed against him.

"You little fool!"

She lay quiet, her face pressed against his cheek. Then she fell to sobbing.

"What difference would it make? Why wouldn't you let me do it?"

IV

Why wouldn't he? It was the question he himself was asking. He had done nothing humane in prevent-

ing her. He had merely spared his own feelings. If she had succeeded, he would have found himself in an ugly situation. He would have been suspected of a crime similar to hers. There would have been no evidence to hang him, but he could never have established his innocence. He looked down at the woman shuddering in his arms, for all the world as though he were her lover. He had been within an ace of inheriting her isolation.

"I didn't let you do it—" He hesitated. Then he took the plunge. "Because I intend to save you."

She stirred. She glanced up at him. As her eyes met his, their expression of wonder gave way to one of gratitude. She strove to reach his lips, but he restrained her.

"Promise me you'll live."

"If you'll help me."

How much she implied by "help me," he did not stop to question.

"We've no time to lose." He spoke hurriedly. "Where's the safest place of hiding?"

"My old one. A hut—"

"I know," he interrupted. "I'll go ahead to make sure the way is clear; you follow at a distance. Keep me in sight. If I look back, take cover."

Without more ado, he turned away, retracing his steps to the camp.

He attempted to walk jauntily, like a nature-lover who had risen early to enjoy the first freshness of the morning. Here and there he stooped to pluck a blackberry. He pulled a sprig of heather for his

THE GREEN EYES CAST A SPELL 189

lapel. He flattered himself that, if he were being watched, his conduct was artistically normal.

For all his display of carelessness, he advanced warily. There was nothing in the billowy expanse of greenness that escaped him. Somewhere within a radius of four miles the Major was waiting to make his pounce. He might be crouched in the next patch of bracken. He might be lying behind the nearest mound. The dapper, gallant-appearing old gentleman, who bore such a striking resemblance to Lord Roberts, assumed the terror of nemesis in his imagination. He seemed everywhere and nowhere. He would pop up, suave and neatly bespatted, at the moment when he was least expected.

He gazed straight before him, not daring to look back, but he never lost consciousness of the fateful woman following him stealthily as a shadow. And always there was the memory of the other woman with the gentle eyes and shining hair.

He reached the camp. It looked lonely as a graveyard. Rows of hutments, bleached to a bluish whiteness, gleamed in the morning sunshine. The downs curled above it like an emerald wave on the point of breaking.

Passing along the bare avenue of silent dwellings he pushed open the door of Santa's place of refuge. Tiptoeing across the dusty floor, he knelt by the window, peering out.

Seconds ticked into minutes. Ten minutes elapsed, twenty, half an hour. There was no sign of life. He strove to calm his fears. If she had been caught,

it simplified matters. But such arguments failed to pacify him. He pictured her as he had seen her on the *Ryndam*—a splendid animal, proud, fastidious, mildly contemptuous; and then as he had seen her that morning, broken, desperate, defiant.

Out there in the happy sunshine they might be carrying her away. They would drag her through the public streets as a criminal. They would lock her in a cell. They would hale her to a court to be gaped at. They would paw over her private life. They would pry into the intimacies of her love-affairs. Nothing that was hers would be sacred. Then, when the sport grew tedious, an old man, turned moralist by reason of decrepitude, would don a black cap and intrust her to the mercy of Almighty God.

He staged her arrest as though he had seen it happen. He had strolled straight through her pursuers' ambush. They had let him pass. Directly she had appeared, they had risen out of the brush. Twisting her arms behind her, they had snapped handcuffs on her slender wrists. She had struggled, sinking to the ground, faint with terror. They had jerked her to her feet, half carrying her, pushing her forward.

He raged impotently. What brutes men were! Nothing that she had done to his sex was bad enough. He thrust the vision from him. Each time it returned.

The door creaked. He leaped as if he had been shot. She pressed a finger to her lips. Coming close,

THE GREEN EYES CAST A SPELL 191

so that he could feel the rise and fall of her bosom, "He's here," she whispered.

V

"Who?"

She was puzzled by his stupidity. Then, "You know," she murmured. "He saw me in the distance and started to run toward me. I dropped to my knees and circled, approaching the hut from the back."

"But he couldn't have recognized you."

"He's on my track."

"Alone?"

"I saw no one else."

Hindwood's forehead wrinkled as he reckoned the cost. "If he comes alone, we can deal with him."

"You mean—?" She did not finish her sentence.

He smiled sternly, thinking how far he had drifted from his moorings. "Scarcely. What made you ask?"

"He's my husband." Her answer was enigmatic.

They held their breath. She was clinging to him. There had been no sound, nothing that could have warned them. Pushing her from him, he stole toward the window. Not fifty yards away, rigid like a hound at fault, stood the Major. Slowly, scarcely turning his head, he was running his eye along the double line of hutments. There was nothing in his expression that would tell what he had

found. As though he sensed that he was watched, he started forward at a rambling pace. He tried no doors. He peered through no panes. His bearing was that of a mildly interested tourist who had stumbled on the camp by accident. He passed out of sight inoffensively, idly slashing at the grass.

It was some time before either of them dared to whisper. Then Hindwood straightened himself and drew back.

"He's gone."

"To return," she said tragically.

"If he returns alone, what of it?"

"He may catch me."

"That doesn't follow. We may catch him instead."

Her eyes grew long and narrow like a cat's. "What would we do with him?" she asked softly.

He regarded her warily. "He told me he loved you," he said irrelevantly.

"Love wouldn't stand in his way—nothing personal. For what he holds to be right, he'd mutilate himself. He'd kill the thing he loved best." She sank her voice. "We all would."

"All—" He paused and began again. "With idealists like the Major, yourself and Varensky, human relations don't count. That was what you were trying to tell me, wasn't it? To achieve individual ideals, you'd sacrifice your own and everybody's happiness."

Her expression became wooden as an idol's.

"You'd sacrifice mine, for instance?"

THE GREEN EYES CAST A SPELL 193

When she refused to answer, he made his inquiry more intrusive.

“My life, perhaps? No obligation of loyalty or gratitude would hinder you? Be honest.”

He recognized the struggle which his words had occasioned. Her sleepy look had vanished. She believed he was preparing to desert her. She was mustering the courage to invent a falsehood. Already her hands were lying. They were wandering over him, patting and caressing. He clasped them in his own, holding her at arm's length. Her eyes met his; they grew steady and absorbed him.

“Even though you were all I had, if your life caused suffering to children, I would kill you.”

He laughed at her solemnity over having told the truth.

“With you it's children; with the Major it's patriotism; with Varensky it's freedom. With me it's nothing. I follow no will-o'-the-wisp—which is lucky for you. You're terribly tired; get some rest while you can. I'll watch. I'm no idealist; you can trust me.”

VI

She had wrapped herself in her sable cloak and curled herself on the floor in the corner remotest from the window. When he judged she was sleeping, he stole to her side and stood gazing down. Her rags were hidden. Except for the weary disorder of

her hair, she was almost the fashionable beauty of his Atlantic voyage.

He looked closer. Fatigue had uncovered something hidden in her countenance, traces of lost girlhood. Her body seemed smaller, her features less decided. The mask of intrigue had fallen. He caught a glimpse of the slim, pathetic child whom the Major had discovered, swaying like lilac-bloom in the perfumed dusk of the Hindoo temple.

Her feet peeped out from beneath the costly fur. Such doll's feet—so little to have come so long a journey! Her ankles were cut by the climb up the cliff. Her shoes were broken. As though the curtain had gone up in the theater of his brain, her feet began to act their story. He saw them tiny and brown, pattering about the shaded bungalow where the English tea-planter had lived with her Burmese mother. He saw them lost and wandering along the roads of India. He saw them in the temple, flashing like a swallow's flight across mosaic pavements. He followed all their progress, as they carried her through triumphs and bereavements to this moment.

She sighed and moved languidly. The robe fell back, revealing her hands. They were grazed and wounded.

Pouring water on his handkerchief from the pitcher, he bathed them gently. Just as he had finished, she opened her eyes.

"You won't leave me?"

"You'll find me sitting here," he assured her, "just like this when you waken."

THE GREEN EYES CAST A SPELL 195

Smiling faintly, she drowsed off obediently as a child.

All day she lay huddled in the corner, oblivious and spent with exhaustion. This must be the first long sleep she had snatched for several days and nights. Crouched beside the window, he guarded her. The Major might return. Varensky might send help. He himself could do nothing till after nightfall. The only food was the broken loaf of bread on the shelf beside the pitcher. He did not dare to touch it; when she woke, she would be hungry. The downs poured in a steady blaze of light. A fly drummed against the panes. On distant hillsides sheep were grazing; he envied them their freedom.

He could go if he liked. As the monotony dragged on, the temptation strengthened. He was under no obligation to make himself an outlaw. If he were to slip away, he would not rouse her. Within the hour he could be speeding up to London. Once there he would be of importance—the one man, at least in some statesmen's estimate, who could solve the European situation. For this woman he was sacrificing the happiness of millions. The fleshpots of Egypt could he his for the claiming. If he stayed and she were arrested, he would be held as her accomplice. Self-interest and altruism urged him to escape. He owed nothing to her. Women had always been for him an enemy country, forbidden and enticing. They had been what darkest Africa was to the explorer, a forest-world of treacherous loveliness. In imagination he had always been approaching their borders,

fascinated by the gleam of uplifted faces. But like Varensky, whose life was a constant challenging of terror, in this one matter he had been cowardly. Since the first false woman of his early manhood—

Why was it, this sudden clamor to possess the thing which all his years he had avoided? Was it because he felt the rising tide of loneliness and knew that the years were gaining on him? All this autumn day, as the silver clearness of morning faded into the deep gold of afternoon, he sat motionless, considering. Up to now he had maintained his pride, flattering himself that it was he who was doing the refusing. He had told himself arrogantly that he would succeed first—succeed immensely; after that he could have any woman for the asking. But could he? He was losing his faculty for sharing. Merely to marry a woman was not to win her. The illusion of ecstasy!

He glanced over to the corner where she lay sleeping. She was the symbol of the feminine half of the world whom he had disregarded. It was she who had roused him, with her parched voice and instinctive passion.

He studied her—her golden face, her cruel lips, her thin, sweet profile. He noticed the delicate firmness of her arms, the fineness of her throat, the tenderness of her molding. At every point she made him aware of his incompleteness.

Across the downs, like a fisherman drawing in his nets, the sun was setting. The hut was vague with

THE GREEN EYES CAST A SPELL 197

dusk. Like the crescent of a young moon, Santa had wakened and was rising.

VII

"You promised to save me."

"I will if I can."

She knotted her hands in mental anguish.

"You must. Any moment he may return. Have you thought of nothing?"

Leaning across his shoulder she lifted the ragged curtain, peering out at the fading landscape; as she gazed, her face stiffened and her eyes became fixed in a leaden stare. Not more than thirty yards distant, with his back toward them, the Major was standing. He had followed their trail still closer.

"We can't escape," she panted. "He'll be there all night, to-morrow, forever."

"We can. Stop here and trust me."

Rising stealthily, leaving the door ajar behind him, he slipped out of the hut. In the twilight he halted, breathing in the sweet evening fragrance. Without further secrecy, he strode toward the Major.

"Good evening. I've been expecting you."

At the first word the Major spun round, alertly on the defensive.

"I have your prisoner," he continued. "I found I had no taste for being added to her list of victims. I'll be glad if you'll take her off my hands. She's in

there." He jerked his thumb across his shoulder.

The Major eyed him fiercely. "How d'you mean, you were expecting me?"

Hindwood laughed. "I caught sight of you last night in Varensky's garden and this morning on the downs. I didn't let you know, because there were things I was anxious to investigate."

"For instance?"

"The purpose of her game."

"And you've satisfied yourself?"

"At the risk of my life—yes. When you warned me against being romantic, I thought you were merely jealous. Fortunately or unfortunately, whichever way you like to put it, I know now that everything you told me was correct."

"Humph!"

The Major twirled his mustaches thoughtfully. In the last of the daylight he looked like a lean, white cat.

His coolness began to wear on Hindwood's nerves. "I suppose your men are hidden. Let's make an end."

"I have no men." The Major spoke slowly. "You forget that this woman is my wife. I wished to spare her as much as possible by making the arrest myself!" His eyes narrowed shrewdly. "How did you manage to secure her?"

"Luck. She had an accident. It's too long a story. She can't get away. I'm through; I've done my share."

As he turned to go, the older man stretched out a

THE GREEN EYES CAST A SPELL 199

delaying hand. His iron discipline wavered. "It's not a cheerful task. If you'll be so good as to stay—"

"If you feel like that—"

"I daren't allow myself to feel. It's something I owe my country."

As though afraid that he would weaken, the Major set out at a run across the turf. Outside the hut he waited. As Hindwood caught up with him, he whispered:

"Two men against one woman! For an old soldier it isn't gallant."

He was on the point of entering, when he felt himself flung violently forward. Hindwood's arm was crooked about his throat, shutting off his breath. Bursting into the hut, he was hurled to the floor and found himself struggling in the darkness. He was being pressed down and down. A voice spoke, the accents of which a minute ago had been friendly.

"Close the door. Get something to bind him. Anything that will hold. Tear strips off your dress."

VIII

It was over. The Major had been trussed and gagged. He had been handcuffed with his own manacles. His revolver had been removed and his pockets searched. He leaned propped against the wall like a jointed doll, his body making an exact right angle with his legs. The angry vigilance of

his eyes was his only sign of life. There was no means of making a light, even if it had been safe to employ it. Now that the fight was ended, they sat staring into the gloom, anonymous as three shadows.

It was Hindwood who broke the silence. "I've been guilty of an outrage, Major; I guess that's what you'd like to tell me. But you gave me no choice. Where I come from, women and children are held sacred. It was up to some man to protect her."

He paused instinctively, as though he expected a reply. He looked to Santa where she crouched, motionless and scarcely discernible, in her corner. What were they thinking, this husband and wife, so brutally reunited? His sense of discomfort urged him to continue.

"Don't run off with the idea that I approve of what she's done. And I'm not in love with her. If she were a man, I don't suppose I'd raise a finger to save her. But she's a woman: inconsistently, that makes all the difference. I couldn't stand for seeing her dragged away to the kind of shame—"

Again he paused. The lack of response was maddening. Scrambling to his feet, he bent over the Major.

"To be frank, now that I've got you, I don't know what to do with you. If you'll promise to keep quiet, I'll remove the gag."

"No." Santa had not stirred. In the darkness she was little more than a voice. "Let me speak while he's forced to listen. Put him where I can see him."

THE GREEN EYES CAST A SPELL 201

Taking his prisoner by the shoulders, Hindwood dragged him to the window. With a jerk he tore the ragged curtain from its nails. The downs were a sea of purple dusk. The moon hung like a lantern in an unruffled sky. Against the square of glass, the Major's face showed hawk-like.

"You've changed." She spoke softly. "Do you remember when last we parted? On the docks at Calcutta. It hurt. Since then we've both gone down the ladder. For both of us it was the end of goodness. I must have known it. I waved till long after you were out of sight; then I wept till my heart was shriveled up. How long I've waited to tell you what you've made me suffer! You made me feel that I'd never been your wife, only a half-caste plaything. But you'd put a white soul into my body. It was a greater wickedness than anything I have done. Now that I'm what you've made me, father of my dead child, you seek me out to be my judge."

Her hoarse voice died away. Like the protest of an uneasy conscience, the Major's handcuffs clinked together.

"You think that you're just," she began again. "You come of a race which admires justice. Ah, but justice is not kindness! You knew what I was when you brought me from the temple—a wanton slave-girl. What had I learned of righteousness? It wasn't for my virtue that you bought me. It was for my pomegranate lips, my golden body, my little, caressing hands. Afterward, as an incentive to desire, it pleased you to bring the soul into my eyes.

You made me long to be perfect. You seemed so strong and wise; I wanted to be like you. Without you I was afraid. You were my God. I felt brave when I touched you."

Her voice sank. "After the little one came, I was no longer frightened. He was so nearly white. He was yours and mine. My blood seemed cleansed. I saw the world through the innocence of his eyes. The evil of the East ceased to call to me. But when he was killed and you put me from you— Murderer of a woman's faith," she addressed the silent face, "the soul in me was dying."

She rocked in the shadows. "My crimes are yours, and you came to condemn me. You robbed me of everything but my body. My heart was famished; to feed it, I sold my beauty at a price. At first, for men's money; then, for their honor; at last, for their lives." She had risen. "You wonder why for their lives? They were men like you, outwardly just, who destroyed belief in goodness. Because of men like you women's hearts are broken and children go naked."

Hindwood leaped to his feet, blocking her path. She leaned past him, staring down into the bandaged face.

"Oh, husband without pity, god whom I worshipped, I burn in hell because of your justice."

Slipping to her knees, she came into the square of light. "Am I not beautiful? Is there another like me? Would it not have been happier to have been kind? See what you have spoiled."

IX

There was the rustling of footsteps in the grass outside. Letting in a flood of moonlight, the door was pushed gently open.

"May we enter?"

Without waiting for a reply, a man padded noiselessly across the threshold. By his peaked head and the litheness of his body, Hindwood recognized him as Varensky. Behind him, with the mildness of attendant angels, Anna and the Little Grandmother followed. Just inside the room he halted.

"What's this?"

The bound face in the square of window had riveted his attention.

"Her husband."

"But why—?"

Hindwood spoke again. "He had come to take her to be hanged."

The pale face smiled contemptuously. "Hanging's only a way of dying. Was that any reason for making him suffer?"

Without further argument, taking command of the situation, he stepped quickly to the Major's side. Stooping, he cut the bonds and removed the gag.

"You're free—free to go where you like and to get us all into trouble. We shall be here for at least an hour, so you'll have time. I landed without permission in your England this morning. That's a

cause for police interference. My name's Ivan Varen-sky."

The Major rose painfully, blinking at the lean, green-eyed stranger as though he had discovered in him a jester. "There are still the handcuffs," he muttered.

When the handcuffs had been knocked off, Varen-sky repeated, "You're free to go."

The Major shook himself and resumed his strut-ting air, like a brave old rooster who had all but had his neck wrung. "If it makes no difference, I'll stay."

With his left eye shut and his head on one side, Varen-sky regarded him comically. "No difference! It may. You're a secret service agent; I'm a revolu-tionary. You uphold laws; I defy them. You're the servant of force; I hate every form of compulsion. What difference it makes depends on yourself—whether you propose to stay as a spy or as a man of honor."

"As a sportsman who abides by the rules of the game."

Varen-sky shrugged his narrow shoulders. "As a sportsman who hunts women?" He turned ten-derly to Santa. "You're famished. We'll cover up the window and make a light."

When candles which they had brought had been kindled and the meal spread, Santa and Hindwood sat down on the floor, facing each other. While they ate there was dead silence. Hindwood kept catching glimpses of her eyes. What was to be the end of her? Her expression was stunned. They both knew

THE GREEN EYES CAST A SPELL 205

what this silence betokened: when the meal was over, her fate was to be decided. He was aware of each separate personality, as though each were making an effort to explain itself. What was to be hoped for from the verdict of such a jury? Every one in the hut, except Anna and himself, was a fanatic. He did not try to see their faces; all he saw was their hands as they ministered to him. The hands of Varensky, half clown's, half martyr's. The wrinkled hands of the old noblewoman, worn with service, who had lived with outcasts and spent her years in exile. The hands of Anna, guilty with yearning.

Varensky spoke without looking up. It was as though he were carrying on a conversation already started. "We can't restore life, so what right have we to destroy it? To be merciful—that's the only way."

His green eyes sought the Major's. "We could have killed you to-night—but we didn't. Have you wondered why? By letting you go, we've put ourselves in your power. To-morrow you can drag us all to jail. You're a hard man. You exact an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth. You came here to-night to exact a life. If we had judged you by your own standards, we should have been justified in giving you no quarter. If we had, what good would it have done? You'd only have been dead. And if you'd managed to capture Santa, what good would that have done? To have had her executed wouldn't have made her a better woman."

He reached out and took her unwilling hand, bending back the fingers one by one. "They're beautiful. See how cleverly they work. There's not a scientist living can reproduce their mechanism. No one knows how they grew to be like that."

His tone became tender. "Santa's been bad. She's been treacherous and cruel: a faithless wife and a menace. Merely to punish her wouldn't undo her evil. Only she can do that."

For the first time the Major spoke. "At what are you driving?"

Varensky made no attempt to answer him. He seemed not to have heard. He sat cross-legged on the floor, folding and unfolding Santa's fingers, while his grotesque shadow squatted on the wall behind him. He looked like a kindly, embarrassed boy, trying to say something to the sulky girl so that it should not sound too wounding.

"I wonder whether Santa's husband ever saw a woman when she was dead. There's no light in her eyes. She can't say that she's sorry. Last week I saw hundreds in the ditches about Kiev. They weren't lovely. We mustn't let our Santa become like that."

He turned to the Major with a slow smile. "Must we? You wouldn't like to think of the woman you had loved—"

The Major took a step into the room and stood biting his lips, glooming down at Varensky.

"You and I, sir, view our duty from hostile stand-points. I care for this woman infinitely more than

THE GREEN EYES CAST A SPELL 207

you can ever care. But I care still more for my country. She's betrayed it a score of times. Shall I, because I am her husband, stand by and allow her to betray it? Had I accomplished the purpose that brought me here to-night, my heart would have been broken. To have put handcuffs on her wrists and to have sworn away her life, do you think it would have cost me nothing? The very judge who sentenced her would have shunned me."

The Little Grandmother looked up. She spoke gruffly. "And what would have been the use of your suffering? Society would have been revenged. It would have washed its hands, like Pontius Pilate. It would have smiled smugly, believing she was wrong and it was right. It would have gone on its way, manufacturing more criminals like her. The old evils that have made her what she is would have continued, while she—" She snapped her fingers furiously. "Like the women in the ditches about Kiev."

When the room had grown silent, Varensky covered the Major with his mocking stare.

"You must excuse our Little Grandmother. She feels these things intensely. More than half her years have been spent in prison."

The Major pulled himself together. "She needs no excusing. What is it that you want of me?"

X

"Santa's life. It's of no use to you." He smiled in the midst of his earnestness. "I'm a boy begging for a broken watch. You were going to throw it away. I have dreams that I could repair it."

The Major twitched irritably. "And you talk like a boy. How can I give you what doesn't belong to me? At every port in Europe the police are watching. For me to forgive her wouldn't help. It isn't against me that she's offended; it's against the laws of civilization."

"I know." Varensky nodded soothingly. "You're only one of the many agents of social vengeance. What I ought to have asked you was to give me the part of her life that does belong to you. She's in your clutches. Let her escape. Keep silent and drop your pursuit."

"And if I do?"

Varensky tucked his legs closer under him and bent forward. "Perhaps I could turn her into a saint." A note of passionate pleading crept into his voice. "She loves children. It was how her wickedness started. She was blind and mistaken, and all her crimes were committed for children. A woman who loves children must be good. She's done abominable things. She could become magnificent if she would do good with an equal violence."

The Major glanced at the subject of these prophecies, sitting in their midst, rebelliously silent. He

THE GREEN EYES CAST A SPELL 209

said wearily: "Mere words! You offer me no proof!"

The white face seemed to grow till it filled the room. The green eyes glowed like emeralds. They were uncanny and hypnotic. Language came in a torrent. "It isn't her body—it's her soul. If she were to die now, what would happen to her? I tried to save the soul of a nation. Let me do for Santa what I couldn't do for Russia—prove that mercy restores where punishment destroys. There's been too much killing. The world grows worse instead of better. It's been going on for ages, this hanging and guillotining and bludgeoning. It's reformed nothing. It's the might is right of the jungle, the justice of apes and cavemen. Revenge, whether it's carried out by tooth and claw or by law-courts and armies, never heals anything; it always leaves a bruise. The face of Europe is bruised beyond recovery by our last display of justice. Its fields are rotten with corpses. Shall we add one more to the many—a woman's?"

He paused, trembling like a leaf. When the Major only frowned, he sank back exhausted.

"If you'd seen what I've seen—" His head sagged stupidly. "If you'd seen what I've seen—miles of men, all slaughtered; women dead of starvation, children hunting in packs like wolves. And all because there's no mercy. If you'd seen, you couldn't kill anything."

The candles ceased to gutter. Shadows huddled motionless. The very silence seemed accused.

Hindwood rose. He could endure the tension no longer. "I know nothing about her soul and not much about her guilt. All I know is that she's a woman at the end of her tether who's been handed one of the rawest of raw deals. That the world's been hard on her won't excuse her. We can't alter the world over night. If she's caught, as she may be at any moment, it'll be all up with her. I don't care what she's done or how much I lose by it, I'm not going to stand by and see her taken."

The Major swung round. "Nor am I. But how to avoid it?"

Hindwood showed his suspicion of this sudden conversion. "Tell me," he answered cautiously, "have you handed in any reports, I mean officially—about my knowledge of Santa?"

"Beyond the fact that you crossed on the same boat with her, you've not been mentioned."

"And there's no one in your service, besides yourself, who has the least idea of her whereabouts?"

"No one."

"Then it can be managed."

He was dimly conscious of the pale expectancy of the faces lifted up to him. He felt that he was on the edge of a whirlpool into which he was being slowly dragged. Even at this last moment he made an effort to resist it. Then it seemed to him that in the heart of its eddies he saw a woman. She grew distinct; her face was Anna's.

"Let me explain," he said. "I'm neither humanitarian nor idealist. I have no fantastic hopes of

THE GREEN EYES CAST A SPELL 211

turning sinners into saints. I'm head of a group of American financiers, and I'm in Europe to employ its starving peoples. Don't misunderstand me. The result of my mission may be philanthropic, but its purpose is to make a profit. Since the war Europe's become a bargain-counter where everything's exposed for sale—everything except food. I can supply food. With food I can purchase, for a fraction of their value, railroads, factories, labor. I tell you this so that you may not doubt me when I say that I have it in my power to protect her. Once out of England, no escaping criminal could find a safer place of refuge than in my company. I have influence with all governments; with food I can stop revolution. None of them dares suspect me. I propose that I should take Santa with me. I travel on diplomatic passports; with me she'll have no trouble in crossing frontiers."

The silence that greeted his offer lengthened. At a loss to account for it, he glanced from face to face.

"Have I offended?"

It was Santa who replied. Leaping up in their midst, tattered and disheveled, she threatened them like dogs whom she would beat aside.

"Beasts!" A sob caught her breath. "Is it impossible even for you, who call yourselves my friends, to believe any good of me? I swear before heaven he has no love for me."

XI

Back in London he lost no time in completing arrangements for departure. Every boat that left for France without him lessened Santa's chance of safety. And yet, though he worked frantically, canceling appointments and clearing up correspondence, he couldn't bring home to himself the reality of the situation. The hut on the downs and all that had happened there seemed something that he had read or imagined. Only the face of Anna stood out in memory, clear-cut and actual. It seemed impossible to believe that he, Philip Hindwood, was in league with revolutionaries. That he was in league was proved to him when he set about procuring the passport and visés necessary for Santa to accompany him. By the time he obtained them, he had abused confidence and perjured himself beyond hope of pardon. They were made out in the name of "Edith Jones, spinster; American-born subject; aged thirty years; confidential secretary to Philip Hindwood, whom she is accompanying." All her permits were marked *Special* and *Diplomatic*. It wasn't until the bustle was over and he was seated in the train for Dover, that the true proportions of his entanglement dawned on him.

At Dover she was to meet him. That had been the understanding. From then on, day in, day out, he would never be without her. No matter what strange country he traversed, she would sit beside

THE GREEN EYES CAST A SPELL 213

him, reminding him of his complicity in her crimes. He would have to talk with her, eat with her, pretend to consult with her, just as if she were what he had claimed her to be—his confidential secretary. Would she have the sense to act discreetly? Would she expect him to make love to her? He glowered out of the window at the fleeting landscape. Any folly was possible to a woman with her record.

What made him most furious was the easy way in which he had allowed her to twist him round her fingers. It was the woods of Vincennes all over again. He was going into disordered countries, where governments were toppling and anarchy was rife. When she felt herself beyond the reach of danger, what was to prevent her from getting rid of him? Russia, if he got so far, was the kind of nightmare in which anything might happen. In Russia murder was one of the fine arts. He remembered Anna's suspicion that Santa was a Bolshevist agent. It added nothing to his comfort.

He had given way to idealism. It was the madness of a moment. It was listening to Varensky that had worked the mischief. Varensky had said something about idealism. What was it? That idealism was the vanishing point—the last outpost between Man and Eternity. His words came back.

“When you gaze up a railroad track, there's always a point in the infinite distance where, just before they vanish, the parallel rails seem to join. If a train were ever to reach that point, it would mean death. Life's like that—a track along which

we travel on the parallel rails of possibility and desire. The lure of the idealist is to overtake the illusion, where possibility and desire seem to merge, and the safety of the journey ends."

For him the safety of the journey had ended the moment it had started. If Varensky had meant anything by the vanishing point, he had meant that death is the unconscious goal of all idealists. Hindwood shrugged his shoulders. It seemed highly probable when you took Santa with you on your travels.

The smell of the sea was in the air. They were slowing down, grinding their way to the docks through the town of Dover.

He didn't want to see her. He would make no effort to find her. She might have been prevented from joining him—perhaps arrested.

After the train had halted, he took his time. No one whom he recognized was on the platform. Directing a porter to attend to his baggage, he went quickly to the embarkation office to get his permit for going aboard. As he was entering, he felt his arm touched timidly, and turned.

"I'm here."

"I see you are."

"Didn't you expect me?"

He made an effort to act courteously. "Of course. There are formalities to be gone through. You'd better stick close to me. Don't attract attention. Let me do the talking."

They fell into line behind a queue of passengers, winding slowly toward a table where officials were re-

THE GREEN EYES CAST A SPELL 215

ceiving and inspecting passports. He stood well in front of her, doing his best to hide her. When his turn came and the official held out his hand, he presented her passport with his own perfunctorily.

"Mine and my secretary's."

The official was on the point of returning them, when a stockily-built man leaned across his shoulder and whispered something. Both of them looked up, staring hard at Santa.

"Which is Miss Jones?" the official asked.

"This lady at my side."

"So you're Miss Jones, an American citizen?"

Before she could reply, Hindwood had interposed. "I've already told you she's Miss Jones. If you'll look, you'll see that her passport's marked *Diplomatic* as well as mine."

The two men consulted together in lowered tones. Then the passport was O.K.'d and restored.

Picking it up, together with the embarkation permits, Hindwood strolled leisurely towards the gang-plank. Directly they were on board he hurried Santa to her cabin and shut the door.

"You'll stay here till we sight France. I'm giving no one else the opportunity for suspecting a likeness."

CHAPTER THE SIXTH

THE ESCAPE

I

THE steamer had no sooner reached Calais than a new cause for alarm presented itself. During the channel crossing Hindwood had been keyed up to the last point of tension. Every moment he had expected to be tapped on the shoulder and informed that his secretary's identity had been discovered. He had spent most of his time surreptitiously mounting guard in the neighborhood of Santa's cabin. If the same man chanced to pass him twice, he had at once jumped to the conclusion that he was being shadowed.

The hesitancy at Dover over O.K.'ing Santa's passport had robbed him of whatever sense of security he had possessed. It had compelled him to acknowledge the ruin that faced him, should he be exposed while engineering the flight of so notorious a criminal. As the Major had warned him, she was being sought by the police of every country.

If the worst should happen, he would find no apologists. It would be useless for him to plead a chivalrous motive. She had been the lodestar of masculine passions too often. Though he managed to escape a prison sentence, he would emerge from the

catastrophe broken in character—a paltry creature, half knave, half fool, who had gambled away his integrity and made himself a laughing stock. Already in imagination he was reading the scare headlines which would advertise his shame to the world. He would be regarded as a malefactor—hustled behind bars and herded for trial with blackmailers and pickpockets.

Dogged by these persistent dreads, when the ship was inside Calais harbor he rapped on her door and having heard her bid him enter, slipped across the threshold, announcing tersely:

“We’re there.”

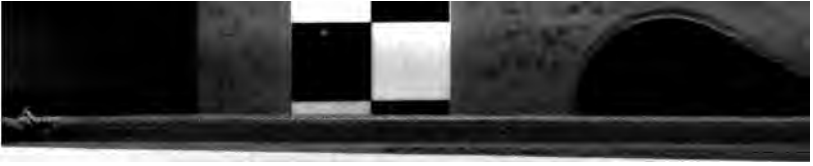
Since she joined him, he had held no conversation with her. She made no attempt to break through his silence. Rising obediently, while she adjusted her hat, she watched him in the mirror with the eyes of a reproachful dog. Without sign or sound, as he turned away impatiently, she followed. No sooner did they appear on deck than the new cause for alarm started.

A handsome and distinguished-looking foreigner began taking immediate notice of her. He was so quick to pick her out in the throng that it seemed he must have been watching for her. Whoever and whatever he was, he was manifestly a man of breeding—the kind of man who might have been her companion in the old, wild days of her triumphant folly. He was about thirty-five, tall, dark, finely-built, and of military bearing. He had a closely-trimmed mustache, bold, black eyes, and a Latin type of counte-

nance. That was all that Hindwood permitted himself to observe; changing his position promptly, he shut Santa out from the stranger's line of vision. But the man was not to be balked. With an air of complete unconcern, he fell into line immediately behind them, treading closely on their heels as they passed up the gangplank. On the way to the Customs he managed to get ahead, so that he could glance back several times at Santa.

After their baggage had been inspected it was necessary for them to file through a stuffy room where passports were examined. It was here that Hindwood was fully prepared to be caught. The officials at Dover had probably cabled a warning; the inquisitive stranger might prove to be their emissary. Quite the contrary occurred. The French official, catching sight of the magic words *Diplomatic* and *Special*, scrutinized no further and returned the papers with a courteous apology. Making the most of his luck, Hindwood hurried Santa out onto the platform, down the long train labeled Stuttgart, Warsaw, etc., and into the *wagons-lits* which went express to Vienna.

Before leaving London he had reserved two separate compartments in the name of "Philip Hindwood and party." Now that he claimed them, he found to his annoyance that they were adjoining and connected by a private door. It was an indiscretion that he had not intended. Having seen Santa safely settled, he set off to superintend the placing on board of their bags.



THE ESCAPE

219

He was gone perhaps five minutes. As he reentered the corridor of his section, the first sight that met his eyes was the handsome stranger engaged in earnest talk with the *wagon-lits* conductor. Some money passed. Next thing the stranger's belongings were being transferred from lower down the train to the compartment on the further side from Santa's. Hindwood entered his own compartment, shaded the windows that looked out on the corridor and made fast his door.

What was the game? Was this a fresh example of Santa's irresistible charm? And if it was, was he to be subjected to this kind of impertinence throughout the entire journey? Or was the man a secret service agent in the employ of some foreign Government, who, believing he had recognized her, was keeping her in sight till she should have crossed the frontier into his own country, where he would have power to arrest her?

In his anger he tried to blame Santa; she must have unconsciously exercised her talent for attraction. Strangers didn't follow women unless—— But he had to own himself unjust. She was dressed with the utmost plainness, in a tailored costume, minus furs or any lavishness. There was nothing to complain of in her deportment. It was as modest as could have been expected had she really been "Edith Jones, aged thirty, American-born citizen, confidential secretary." The fault lay in something beyond her control—her beauty. It refused to be subdued. It shone out the more conspicuously in

the absence of adornment. It constituted itself an unforeseen embarrassment, if not a menace. The further he traveled into continental countries, the less he would be believed when he stated that she was Miss Jones and no more than his secretary. Already more people than the obtrusive stranger had stared at her. She had only to appear to make herself the focus of attention. Sooner or later, to-day, to-morrow, a month hence, some one would catch sight of her who had known her in the past. She had been fêted in too many cities, her portrait had been too widely published, for her features not to be remembered. These distressing reflections were cut short by the shrill tootings of tin horns which announce the departure of a train in France. When Calais had been left behind and they were rushing past stripped orchards and harvested fields, he unlatched the dividing door. She was sitting lost in thought, staring out of the window with a wistful expression.

"Come into my compartment. I'd like to talk."

The jerk with which she turned betrayed the strain under which she was laboring. He watched the undulating grace with which she rose, the calculated delicacy of her every movement. Though she had dressed in rags, nothing could have disguised her.

When he had closed the door, she remained standing.

"Please sit down," he said with cold politeness. "We're safe for the moment. As you see, I've low-

ered the blinds. No one can spy on us. You've noticed him?"

Drawing off her gloves, she smoothed them out mechanically, maintaining her silence.

"Tell me," he urged, "what do you make of him?"

"Nothing." Her voice was flat and toneless. "Wherever I go, it's always the same. You ought to know—on the *Ryndam* you were like it."

He passed over the implied accusation. "Then you don't think he's a——?"

"I've not troubled to think." She glanced drearily aside. "Men are brutes. If you'd left me alone on the cliff—I wish you had. It would have been all ended."

She said it without spite—almost without reproach. In the presence of her melancholy, he recovered something of his compassion.

"But I didn't leave you, and nothing's gained by recrimination. The point is this fellow next door. What's his purpose? How are we going to manage him?"

"Easily. Fling me to him as you'd toss a dog a bone. You'll be rid of your share of the danger."

"I don't want to be rid of you." He passed his hand across his forehead, mastering his impatience. "I don't pretend I shan't be glad——"

"To be quit of me," she prompted.

"To be relieved of the risk of you," he corrected. "But not until I've fulfilled my promise."

She smiled. "You promised you'd save me. I

can't be saved. Varensky's talk about redeeming me was visionary. I was born to be what I am."

He relaxed and sat forward, exerting himself to make the conversation less unfriendly. "Of course I know why you speak this way: it's because of my recent treatment of you. We were nearly found out at Dover; the anxiety of it's getting on my nerves. I promised to give you your chance; my promise stands. The least I can ask of you as a sportswoman is to play up to me."

Her whole demeanor changed. The golden face flashed. "I will."

"Then if this man is only an impudent admirer, how are we to shake him? It's my business for the present to protect you. If this is the sort of thing that always happens, it's possible that it'll occur again. I daren't resent his conduct. Ordinarily I should know what to do with him. How is the repetition of the annoyance to be avoided?"

A slow flush mounted from her throat to her cheeks. "You won't take my suggestion, so I don't think I'll make it."

"Let's have it."

Not looking at him, she muttered: "He'll try to scrape acquaintance. When he does, introduce me to him as your wife."

"But to do that——"

He fell silent. He was thinking of Anna. For the first time he was conscious of his aloneness with this woman.

Not wishing to wound her, he procrastinated.

"To do that might only add to our complications."

"It might." Her gray eyes struggled to meet his gaze. "It isn't likely. He won't believe you."

"Then what would be gained?"

"You'd have told him, without insult, that he wasn't wanted."

He glanced out of the window at the rushing landscape. At last he spoke. "If there's no other way——"

She rested her thin, fine hand on his gently. "You're generous. If the day ever comes when you despise yourself as I despise myself to-day, remember that once you were able to make a wicked woman believe in goodness—to make her long with all her heart to be like you." Her eyes became misty. "At this moment I'm not far from redemption."

Lunch was announced. He gave orders to have it served in his compartment. While they ate, he outlined to her his plans. He had asked her how long she expected to be with him.

Her reply was uncomfortably vague. "As long as you can endure me."

"Inside of two months," he told her, "I think I can promise you immunity. At present, according to information, Central Europe's starving. With winter comes the crisis. I've forseen that. For some time I've been shipping food to Holland. It's lying there in warehouses in immense quantities. I have an entire fleet secretly at work, plying back and forth across the Atlantic. When the famine becomes too acute, I'm prepared to strike my bar-

gain. I'll take railroads and concessions in exchange for bread. Other upstarts have carved out kingdoms with armies; I intend to conquer mine with food. There never was a war or any social uprising that wasn't caused by an empty stomach. Within three hours of my terms having been accepted, my trains will be streaming out of Holland. Where they halt, the flames of revolution will be quenched. If I haven't miscalculated, I shall be unofficial President of the United States of Europe." He paused to watch his effect. "I've nominated myself," he smiled.

His smile was unreturned. She was regarding him with an expression of horror. Their rôles seemed reversed. It was evident that to her way of thinking it was he who had become the criminal and she who was looking down on him from a higher moral level.

"But they're starving." Her voice shook passionately. "If you have these stores, why don't you feed them? They're dying. So many of them are children!"

"You don't understand." He tried to make his tones reasonable. "I've invested all my fortune in the venture. I'm a business man. In business one man's calamity is another's opportunity. The same is true of nations."

Seeing that she still looked grieved, he patted her shoulder. "Don't worry. We'll rustle through. Your life will be spared."

"I wasn't thinking of my life." She spoke contemptuously.

"Then of what?"

"Of the women dead of hunger in the ditches about Kiev."

As she rose to leave, she glanced back from the doorway. "There was a message I had to deliver to you. Varensky's setting out on his last journey. He hopes to see you in Budapest. He told me to say, 'Soon you can have her.'"

II

Thrusting its war-scarred head into the clouds, Amiens had been left behind: they were skirting the old battle-line. Though seasons had come and vanished, memories of tragedy were still apparent. Shell-torn walls had been patched, but the patches served to emphasize the ruin. One could trace in the landscape crumbling trench-systems and the rusty red of entangled wire. Here and there, in gleaming plots, white crosses grew in humble clusters. In fancy he pictured the hosts who had died. The unprofitable patience of their sacrifice! Had they known what was to be the result, would they have gone to their death so gladly? The result of their idealism was hunger. He recalled his awkward phrase—the world's hunger had proved to be his opportunity. Santa's horror disturbed his memory. He was inclined to go to her and explain. Every-

thing had to be purchased by labor. Anything one possessed was the wage of labor. To give things away did harm. It wasn't business. It set a premium on laziness. Even to give food to a starving nation did harm; it made that nation a pauper. The most primitive of all laws was that bread should be earned by the sweat of the brow—that if a man did not toil, neither should he eat. The only righteous way to feed starving people was to set them to work. So his thoughts ran on, building up the argument.

But he did not go to her. It was Varensky's message that deterred him: "He told me to say, 'Soon you can have her.'" Did Santa know what was meant—that the message referred to Anna? She must know. What difference would this make to her? She also loved, and she was a panther-woman.

The countryside grew blurred with dusk. The stiff, white crosses faded out of sight. Forgetting his danger, he fell asleep, wondering whether Anna would be with her husband at Budapest.

III

When he awoke, he was in total darkness. Glancing through the window, he discovered that the world outside was weakly lit with straggling rows of street-lamps. They seemed to be marching in the same direction as the train; in the far distance they

rushed together, making night hollow with their flare. His first thought was of Santa; a thousand things might have happened.

As he groped at the handle of the dividing door, he caught the sound of laughter.

"May I enter?"

The Santa whom his eyes encountered was no longer the fugitive from justice. She was mysteriously changed. There was animation in her countenance and seduction in her voice. She was again the enchantress of men, reckless and tender, who had all but captured his heart on the Atlantic voyage. He looked to see what had caused this transformation. Lolling in the entrance was the handsome stranger.

Before Hindwood could speak, she was addressing him gaily. "So you've wakened! I didn't like to disturb you. You've almost made me miss my dinner. If you're ready now——"

The stranger interrupted. "I've not dined. But I have my place reserved. If there should prove to be no room, perhaps you would flatter me by occupying my place instead."

Santa shook her head graciously. "It's good of you, but my husband and I will take our chance."

She was the only one whom her claim that Hindwood was her husband left undisturbed. The two men glared at each other in astonishment. It was the stranger who recovered first.

"If I had known that this lady was your wife, I should have asked your permission before I made

my offer. I shall be very happy if you will permit me to do you both this service. I ought to introduce myself."

He fumbled in his pocketbook and produced a card on which was engraved, "Captain Serge Lajos, Hungarian Royal Hussars."

"My name is Hindwood—Philip Hindwood." Hindwood returned the compliment surlily. "I agree with my wife; we both prefer that you retain your place and that we be allowed to take our chance."

Santa rose eagerly to prevent the giving of further offense. Her smile was for the Captain. "We waste time talking. You'll join us, Captain? We'll take our chance together."

Without risking a reply, she led the way, Hindwood following and the Captain coming last. There was no opportunity for speech in the swaying corridor. When the dining-car was reached, they were shown immediately to a vacant table.

At first they sat in silence, watching how the lights flashing by the panes were strengthening into a golden blur.

"Where are we?"

It was Hindwood who had decided to be amiable.

"Entering Paris."

"So late as that!" He consulted his watch. "We go through without changing, they told us."

"There's no change till Vienna."

The Captain's answers were mechanical. He seemed to be brushing aside a presence that an-

noyed him. His puzzled eyes were fixed on Santa.

Suppressing his irritation, Hindwood made another effort at friendliness. "I didn't notice you till we were getting into Calais. I guess we must have traveled together from London."

Captain Lajos, if that really was his name, seemed to be thinking of something else. He let some seconds elapse. When he spoke, it was without looking up. "I noticed you from the first. I can prove it. Your wife didn't join you till Dover." Then he seemed to repent of his intrusive rudeness and changed the subject. "I was glad to see the last of London. I'd been sent to meet some one who failed to arrive. It was all in the papers. You probably know as much about the circumstances as I do. The person was Prince Rogovich."

Santa's face went white. Her lips became set in an artificial smile. Beneath the table her hand clutched Hindwood's. For all that, it was she who took up the challenge.

"We've not been reading the papers lately." Above the clatter of the wheels, her trembling voice was scarcely audible. "My husband and I have been very busy and—— But your friend, why was he so unkind as to disappoint you?"

The Captain had turned to her as though greedy for her sympathy. His dark, bold eyes drank up her face.

"He wasn't unkind. He was——" He shrugged his shoulders and spread abroad his hands. "Until something is proved, I suppose the best way to ex-

press it would be to say that he was unavoidably delayed. He left New York on a liner and disappeared on the evening that he should have landed."

Hindwood bent forward, attempting to divert attention from Santa. He tapped the Captain's hand.

"Excuse me for intruding on a conversation which you evidently intend to include only my wife, but there are no points of call on an Atlantic voyage. If your friend started from New York and the ship was not lost, how could he have been delayed?"

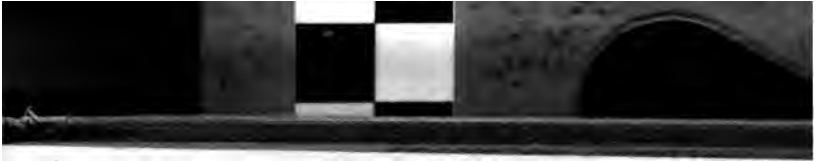
"How? That's the question."

The Captain's hostility was unmistakable, and yet the odd thing was that it exempted Santa.

While the first course was being served, Hindwood racked his brains to discover the motive which lay behind the Captain's attitude. Was he a police-agent, amusing himself and biding his time? Was he doubtful of Santa's identity and cultivating her acquaintance as a means of making certain? Was he merely a disappointed male, infuriated at finding a husband in possession?

Santa was speaking again. She had made good use of the respite to compose herself. "It must have been terribly anxious for you waiting. I suppose you were there to meet him at the port where he ought to have arrived?"

Hindwood held his breath. She was practically asking the man whether he had been one of the welcoming group of officials on that night when the *Ryndam* had reached Plymouth. If he had been, he



THE ESCAPE

231

must have seen them. He must remember them. He might even know their biographical details, their business, and that they were not married. At all events, if that were the case, it would explain the keenness of his interest.

“No, I wasn’t at Plymouth.”

They both shot upright in their chairs and sat rigid. For a moment they had no doubt that the Captain had declared his hand.

Then he postponed the crisis by adding, “You see, my friend, as you call him, was traveling by the Holland-American Line, so Plymouth was where he should have landed. We had a special train arranged to hurry him to London. The first warning I received of the disaster was at Paddington, when I was informed that the special train had been canceled.”

“Then it was a disaster?”

Santa asked the question in an awed tone which, under the circumstances, was not altogether feigned. Getting a grip on herself, she leaned across the table, making her eyes large and tender. “We’re fellow-travelers, chance-met. My husband and I are Americans; when we part from you, it’s almost certain we shall never meet again. I’m not seeking your confidence, but you’re worried. If it would help you to tell——”

The Captain shook his head gravely. He appeared to be worshipping her in everything save words, though it was possible that his adoration was mockery. “There’s nothing to tell. Not yet.

I wish there were. There may be something at Paris. The English police are working. They promised to keep in touch with me by telegram."

With amazing daring Santa persisted, "But what do you suppose happened?"

Before answering the Captain arranged his knife and fork neatly on his plate. He looked up sharply like a bird of prey. "Murder. To your dainty ears that must sound shocking. I have reasons for this belief which, for the present, I'm not at liberty to share."

During the pause that followed Hindwood was on tenterhooks lest, with her next question, she should betray herself. To prevent her, he flung himself into the gap.

"I agree with you," he said with weighty dullness. "I agree with you that some sort of accident strikes one as extremely likely. You mentioned that a special had been chartered to bring your friend to London. That would indicate that he was a person of consequence."

"He was."

The words sounded like an epitaph. They were spoken with the impatience of a door being banged.

Turning to Santa, the Captain was on the point of saying something further, when the waiter approached with the information that at the next stop the dining-car would be cut off. They became aware that they were the only diners left. The train was slowing down. The noise of its progress had changed to a hollow rumbling, which told them

that a bridge was being crossed. Shifting their gaze, they discovered Paris, sparkling like a pile of jewels strewn in the lap of night. Below them in slow coils, mysterious with luminous reflections, wound the Seine. Hindwood's instant thought was that somewhere out there beneath the darkness, the woods of Vincennes were hiding.

Having paid their bill, they commenced the return journey through corridors dense with eager passengers. Before their section had been reached, the train was in the station. At the first open door, the Captain sprang to the platform and was lost.

"Where's he gone?" Santa whispered.

Hindwood glanced at her palely. "To get his telegram. To get——"

Seizing her arm, he hurried her back to his compartment, where behind locked doors they could spend in private whatever of freedom remained.

IV

"The jig's up."

Hoping that he was creating an impression of calmness, he lit a cigarette. She raised her face to his with a softness in her eyes that he had never noticed.

"If it is," she pleaded, clutching at his hands, "swear you hadn't the least idea who I really am. Disown me. Act as though my arrest had come to you as an utter shock."

He seated himself beside her. "But, my dear Santa, that wouldn't help you."

"Help me! Of course not," she agreed with rapid vehemence. "If I'm caught, I'm beyond helping. It's of you I'm thinking—you, with your generosity and your splendid plans. If I dragged you down, as I dragged down all the others, my heart would break. I never meant you any harm. You do believe me?"

"I do now."

"Say you know that I've loved you," she urged. And, when he hesitated, "Quickly. Time's running short. Let me hear you say just once, 'Santa, I know that you've loved me.'"

"Santa, I know——"

"You wouldn't kiss me?" She asked the question scarcely above her breath. "There've been so many who paid to kiss me. You wouldn't give me the best, that would be the last?"

When his lips touched hers, she smiled.

"They may come now."

Minutes dragged by like hours. Every sound was magnified into something monstrous. A dozen times they imagined they heard police clearing the corridor, preparatory to bursting in the door. What they heard was only newly-arrived passengers and porters disposing of their baggage. At last suspense became its own anesthetic.

"Did he tell you his destination?" Hindwood whispered.

Not daring to speak, she shook her head.

"Why did you get into conversation with him?"

Her lips scarcely moved. He had to listen acutely.

"I didn't. He pretended to have mistaken his compartment. I was crying. He saw."

"Why were you crying?"

"Because of you."

"And you told him?"

"Not exactly."

"What did he say? I heard you laughing when I entered. How did he commence?"

"He said I was too beautiful to be unhappy—it's the way every man starts. Then he said that he'd recognized me, just as though he'd been looking for me always. And then he tortured me by wondering whether our paths had ever crossed."

"And you answered?"

"Never—unless he'd seen me in America."

Hindwood fell silent. Without warning he leaped to his feet. Before he could escape, she was clinging to him.

"Don't leave me to face them."

"I'm not." He freed himself from her grasp. "If I've guessed right, you won't have to face them."

With that he was gone.

A quarter of an hour elapsed: he had not returned. Nothing that she dreaded had happened. With a lurch the train jerked forward. Farewells were being shouted. Station-lamps streamed past, the scarcer lights of freight-yards, then at last the glow-worm warmth of a city under darkness.

The door opened. She rose trembling, steadying herself against the wall. When she saw who it was, she sank back. "Tell me."

"We were on the wrong track." He spoke leisurely. "Captain Lajos wasn't lying. I followed him. He met his man with the telegram. He suspects us so little that he showed it to me. It read, 'No further developments.'"

"Thank God." She pressed her handkerchief to her lips. And then, "Why should he have shown it to you? It was to put us off our guard."

He sat down in the seat opposite. "I think not. He's changed his tactics. He's made up his mind to be friendly. It's you he's after, but in a different fashion. He thinks he's in love with you."

"But he threatened——"

"No. It was our own guilty conscience. Here's how I figure it out. He probably has seen you before. He can't remember where. It may have been in the days when you were dancing. It was the vague recollection of you that piqued his curiosity and got him staring. When he found you alone and crying, he thought he'd stumbled on an adventure. My entering upset his calculations. I became for him the cruel husband; he hated me on the spot. My dear Santa, our meeting with him is the luckiest thing that could have happened."

Dabbing her eyes, she tried to laugh. "I don't see it."

"It's as plain as a pike-staff." He bent forward, lowering his voice. "He was mixed up with Prince

Rogovich. He's one of the people who's hunting for you. In his company you won't be suspected. He'll get you across all the frontiers."

She was still reluctantly incredulous. "But the things he said at dinner. He played with us like a cat."

"He wasn't playing with us." Hindwood became eager in his determination to convince her. "He was playing into our hands. He knows all the things that we want to know. Every move the police make is telegraphed to him. It was the frankness with which he let us into his secrets that was so alarming."

"Then how must we act?"

"The way we have been acting. Until it's safe to be rid of him, we must keep him believing that we're married, and none too happily. I'm afraid it's up to you to keep him lulled by pretending——"

"Don't"; she closed her eyes. "It's like going back to the ugly past."

"It's beastly, I know." He spoke seriously. "But what else——? Any moment he may recall where last he saw you. Sleep over it. We can decide in the morning."

V

All night he had been haunted by the oppressive sense that, if he did not watch, something terrible would happen. It was shortly after dawn when he rose. Stepping into the corridor he found that he

had the train to himself. It seemed as depopulated as an early morning house and, despite the clamor of its going, as silent. He placed himself near Santa's door and stood staring out at the misty landscape streaking past like a trail of smoke. It was here that Santa found him when she slipped from her compartment.

He turned quickly. "He's not up yet." Then, noticing her pallor and the shadows under her eyes, "You haven't slept?"

"Not much."

"Making your decision, I suppose?"

She bit her lip nervously. "I shall have to pretend— It'll only be pretending. You'll understand?"

"It won't last long," he comforted her. "If we've been running on time, we must be in Alsace-Lorraine already. Within the next few hours we'll be out of France and into Germany. You'll feel safer there, won't you?"

What he was really asking was whether it wasn't true that during the war she'd been a German spy.

"Shall I?" was all she answered.

They fell silent. Without mentioning it, each guessed the motive which had occasioned the other's early rising. They dared not let the Captain out of their sight. While they could not see him, they had no peace of mind. Whereas yesterday his companionship had seemed to spell death, to-day it spelt protection. Yesterday they had done everything to elude him; to-day it would probably be he who would

do the avoiding. It was essential that they should have won his confidence before they arrived on German soil. There was little time to lose. He had not appeared when the first sitting for breakfast was announced.

In the restaurant car they dawdled over their meal and sat on long after it was ended. They had even begun to discuss the possibility of his having left the train during the night, when with an eagerness kindred to their own he entered. Hindwood waved to him.

"I'm afraid we've finished. But won't you seat yourself at our table? I've no doubt my wife will join you in a cup of coffee. While you breakfast, if it's not objectionable, I'll smoke a cigarette."

Captain Lajos beamed like a pleased boy. If one wasn't prejudiced in his disfavor, it was possible to find him likable. "I shall be delighted," he said in an embarrassed tone. "Journeys are tedious nowadays. Once every one who counted was gay and prosperous; one was never at a loss to find a friend. To-day, in this bankrupt world, the only travelers are money-lenders and pawn-brokers." He laughed. "I may as well confess: I didn't think you were up yet—that's what made me late. I was so tired of my own society that I was waiting for you."

As he said, "I was waiting for you," his eyes flashed on Santa.

It was she who spoke. "I fancy we've been just as bored with ourselves and even more eager to meet you. What you told us last night sounded so mys-

terious and romantic. I could hardly sleep for thinking about it. To have a Prince for one's friend and to travel so far to welcome him, only to find——" She clasped her hands childishly. "Life can be so drab—how drab, a man of your kind can never know. American husbands, no matter what they possess, take a pride in always working."

He disappointed her curiosity with a crooked smile. "Whether you're a Prince or a millionaire, there's nothing romantic about being murdered."

Then her allurements kindled the longing in his eyes. "You're wanting me to confide the secrets that I warned you I couldn't share. Surely you must know something of Prince Rogovich?"

"No. Truly." She returned his searching gaze with apparent frankness.

Hindwood jogged her elbow. "My dear, I've remembered. When we sailed there was a Prince Rogovich in the States, doing his best to raise a loan—I think it was for Poland. It was rumored that the money was to be squandered on military adventures. I guess he didn't find many takers. You're in the Hungarian Hussars, Captain, but you must excuse me for stating that on our side of the Atlantic we've seen all we want of armies."

Santa clicked her tongue impatiently. "That's all very well, but it doesn't explain why the Prince——"

"It might," Hindwood insisted mildly. "Discouraged men often commit suicide. He was coming home. He'd failed in his object——"

"He hadn't." The Captain glanced quickly behind him to see whether any one could have heard him. He continued in a voice that was little above a whisper, "Only a few of us knew. He was coming home in triumph."

Leaning across the table with suppressed excitement, Santa made the appeal of pretty women throughout the ages. "I wish you'd trust me."

Hindwood pushed back his chair. "It's time for a cigar. Perhaps you'll join me later. If you'll excuse me——"

They paid him scant attention. The last he saw of them they were gazing enraptured into each other's eyes.

VI

It was well over an hour since he had returned to his compartment. He had left his door wide, so that he could inspect every one who passed along the corridor. They couldn't have slipped by without his noticing. He was becoming almost as distrustful of Santa as he was of the stranger. Already the rôle of unwanted husband was growing irksome. The thing that baffled him most was her morbid curiosity. It was revolting to think of her, with her disarming air of refinement, encouraging her admirer to conjecture the details of a crime which she herself had committed. But how had she committed it? He himself did not know. He had just begun to contrive the scene in his mind

when they entered. Her face was lit with a new intensity. At a glance he was aware that whatever she had learned had quickened her emotions. The Captain followed grudgingly, like a dog hanging back on a chain.

"Captain Lajos has been telling me," she commenced. "But we'd better have the door closed. He's been telling me things that you ought to know. He's so concerned for my sake that he's offered to repeat them."

The Captain seated himself opposite to Hindwood and regarded him gravely. "The things that I've been telling your wife are not my secrets. I must ask you to give me your solemn promise."

"You may take that for granted."

"And there's one other point. I didn't offer to repeat them; it was Mrs. Hindwood who urged me. I'm making this plain because I don't want you to think I'm offering you my advice uninvited."

Hindwood lit a fresh cigar, fortifying himself against whatever shock was pending. "I give you full credit for your motives."

"Then let me ask you a question. Have you noticed that there are scarcely any women on this train?"

"I believe you're right. But until you mentioned it I hadn't noticed."

"Well, if you'll watch, you'll see that I'm correct. There are women and children in plenty on trains moving westward. But on trains moving eastward, where we're going—no."

Hindwood watched the man intently, wondering at what he was driving.

"Would you be surprised," he continued, "if I were to tell you that one of the chief reasons for the women's absence is this affair of Prince Rogovich?"

"You rather harp on Prince Rogovich, don't you?" Hindwood flicked his ash. "After a time one ceases to be surprised at anything. But aren't you presuming too much in insisting on his having been murdered? All that's known by your own account is that he's vanished. In any case, what can he possibly have to do with the scarcity of women on trains running eastward?"

"Everything." The Captain's face darkened with earnestness. "What I'm trying to tell you is that you're taking your wife into danger. Every man who can afford it, in the countries to which you're going, is hurrying his women-folk to France, England, Spain, America — anywhere westward for safety. They can feel the storm rising, the deluge of catastrophe that can't be held back much longer. When it bursts, it'll tear everything established from its moorings and sweep across Europe in a wave of savagery."

"And this deluge that you speak of—what had Prince Rogovich to do with it?"

"He was keeping it from bursting."

Hindwood smiled. "Alone?"

"No man's single strength could accomplish that. He was one of the most powerful of the resisting

forces. When society's tottering, it's the little added strain that upsets the equilibrium. Remember how the last war started, with an obscure assassination."

Hindwood crossed his knees and dug himself back into the cushions. "Your information, to say the least of it, is strangely melodramatic. If I understand you aright, you're urging me to discontinue my journey. Can't you be more explicit?"

"I can." The Captain betrayed a hint of temper. "I suppose I shall have to if I'm to convince you. The stability of the whole of Central and Eastern Europe has been upset by the repartitioning of the Peace Treaty. The situation as it exists to-day is intolerable. The ruin which the war commenced has been completed by the pacification. The old social order has been overthrown; in its place we have a dozen rash experiments. In Russia, instead of the Czar, we have Bolshevism. In what was once the Austro-Hungarian Empire we have a series of Republics, which are nothing more than old racial hatreds entrenched behind newly created frontiers. In Poland, which was prisoner to three nations for two centuries, we have a released convict, vengeful with a sense of past injustice. Instead of reconstruction, we have disorganization. Trade is at a standstill. Money is valueless. Confidence is gone. Poverty has made a clean sweep of class distinctions. Mob-rule has usurped the rights of authority. Like a lean wolf, famine gallops through the desolation in ever widening circles."

"But Prince Rogovich?" Hindwood recalled him. "What had he to do with it?"

"He was the leader of the monarchist party in Europe—the organizer of a secret movement to set up again the thrones which war has toppled. Incidentally he was to have established a new throne for himself in Poland. Behind him he had the land-owning classes and the old aristocracy, which the new régime of haphazard democracy has beggared. He was biding his time till the crisis should become sufficiently acute for him to strike his blow. He had his armies ready. All he lacked was munitions. The floating of the loan in America completed his program."

"But you said that the fact that he was returning in triumph was known only to a few. If only a few knew it, why should his death have caused this sudden exodus of women on trains running westward?"

"For two reasons: because he was the recognized strong man of the buffer states which lie between Russian anarchy and civilization; and because the crisis of starvation, for which he had been waiting, is now in sight. While Bolshevism was making its drives against Poland, Central Europe was compelled to hold together. Now that Bolshevism is crumbling, that compulsion is relaxed. All the way from Siberia to the frontiers of Germany millions are perishing from lack of food. Presently the Russian millions will commence to march westward to the lands of plenty. They'll march like Death, swinging his scythe. They'll sweep on like a pestilence.

They'll lope like gaunt wolves, savage and relentless. The starving peoples of Central Europe, who would once have resisted them, will join them. Prince Rogovich, had he lived, could have prevented them."

"How?" It was Santa.

"He would have declared a new war, with the return to monarchy as his battle-cry. He had his nucleus armies in readiness; they would have sprung from their hiding-places overnight. There would have been a tremendous rally to him as the only man unscrupulous enough to handle the situation. He would have made his bargain with the Allies."

"And then?"

"He would have trained his guns on the lean hordes of Russia and would have blown them back across their borders."

Again Santa spoke. Her voice came low and haltingly. "He would have made the world pass through the fires of Moloch for a second time. The person who murdered him must have known it."

Hindwood turned to her. There was a startled expression in his eyes. He was quite certain she had known it. He was seeing the real Santa for the first time. She was a Charlotte Corday, who had dipped her hands in blood that she might prevent a more colossal crime.

"I begin to see," he muttered.

The Captain took the words as addressed to himself. "I'm glad you do. It must be obvious to you now that where you're going is no place for a

woman. If you'll accept my advice, you'll turn back at the next stopping-place."

"Impossible." Hindwood recalled himself to the part he was playing. "You're a soldier; you'd be ashamed to run away at the first hint of danger. In a sense I also am a soldier, a soldier of business. I, too, have my marching orders and my duty."

"Then if you won't turn back yourself, send Mrs. Hindwood back." The man's voice shook. "You're taking her to almost certain death. She's too beautiful—I beg it of you."

To his amazement Hindwood found himself liking the stranger. "My wife's beauty has no bearing on the problem. We're exceedingly grateful to you, Captain Lajos; but to act on your warning—it's out of the question."

The Captain shot him a dark look, then let his gaze rest on Santa. When she kept her eyes averted, he pretended to lose interest in the subject. The train was slowing down. He cleared the pane with his glove.

"It's the frontier."

Hindwood rose and hurriedly commenced to gather together his belongings. Sitting perfectly still with an air of quiet criticism, the Captain watched him. When the last bag had been strapped and made ready for removal, "Why are you doing that?" he inquired.

"The German Customs. I suppose we'll have to get out and go through the old jog-trot of being inspected."

"You don't need to; you can have it done here."

Excuse me, if I seem officious. I was immediately behind you at Calais and couldn't help noticing that your passports are the same as mine—diplomatic. The advantage of a diplomatic passport in crossing frontiers is that the officials have to come to you."

"I didn't know. If that's the case—"

He resumed his seat with a sickening sensation. The Captain's presence was stifling him. He longed to escape, if it were only for five minutes. He felt choked with lies. It seemed impossible that the Captain should not be aware of the atmosphere of falsehood.

Passengers were already filing down the corridor and being herded by soldiers on the platform. As carriages were emptied, doors were locked and sealed. Evidently nothing was to be left to chance; while the passengers were held prisoners in the waiting-rooms, the train was to be searched from end to end. To a guilty conscience there was something exceedingly intimidating about this military display of thoroughness.

The *wagon-lits* conductor looked into the compartment. Seeing the three of them seated there, he burst into a frantic protest. Captain Lajos annihilated him with the ferocity of his explanation. When the conductor had retreated, the Captain turned to Hindwood.

"Like most of your compatriots, I see you're not strong on languages. If I can be of use to you, I'll act as your interpreter."

"My wife is—" Then he remembered that he

knew nothing of Santa's linguistic attainments. "You're very thoughtful of our comfort," he substituted.

Guttural voices sounded. Two crop-headed ex-drill-sergeants presented themselves. Without waste of words they rasped out a peremptory order.

"They want to see your passports," the Captain interpreted.

While the passports were being examined, there was silence. Again questions were asked and again the Captain interpreted.

"Are you carrying fire-arms?"

"Have you any contraband?"

"Do you intend to stay in Germany?"

There was a pause. The passports were folded and on the point of being returned when another unintelligible conversation started.

The Captain smiled. "They're punctilious. As a matter of form, they want to hear you assert that you're the Philip Hindwood to whom this passport was issued."

"Most certainly. They can prove that by comparing my face with the attached photograph."

The Captain turned to Santa with the utmost suavity. "And that you're the Edith Jones, Mr. Hindwood's secretary."

Having exploded his bomb, he rose. For a moment he seemed to hesitate as to whether he should expose them. Then, making a stiff bow, he murmured, "That's all."

Directly he had departed, Hindwood locked the

door behind him. "He shall ferret out no more of our secrets."

From then on, they traveled in a state of siege. Several times they thought they heard a tapping. Whether it was the Captain's, they did not allow themselves to discover. They opened to no one whom they had not summoned.

VII

Soon after the train restarted, Santa rested her hand on his arm. "You think better of me now. I'm so tired, I should cry if you spoke to me. Let me sleep on your couch. I'm afraid to be alone."

He covered her with his rug and did his best to make her comfortable. She was utterly exhausted. In a few minutes her eyes closed and she was breathing gently.

Several hours elapsed. She was still sleeping. He was glad not to have to talk. His mind was filled with a tremendous picture: "There was a certain rich man, which was clothed in purple and fine linen, and fared sumptuously every day. And there was a certain beggar named Lazarus, which was laid at his gate full of sores."

He saw the world that he was leaving, self-satisfied, callous, well-nourished. He saw the world to which he was going, out of which he had planned to make a profit—a world picked clean by the crime of war and peopled by living skeletons. When its

pain had passed beyond endurance, the outcast world would attack the world which was comfortable. It would come crawling like a beggar to a rich man's door. When it found the door barred, it would go mad. It had nothing to lose by violence. With its bare hands it would storm the dwelling.

How would the comfortable world defend itself? The Captain said with cannon. From a safe distance it would blow the empty bellies into nothingness. But bread was cheaper than high explosives. Why not fill the empty bellies instead of shattering them?

He recalled the fields round Amiens, starred with miniature forests of stiff, protesting crosses. Why had those crosses been planted if it had not been to teach the living world to share?

A barricade of bread could prevent further bloodshed. It always could have prevented it. The gray tide of wolf-men could be halted by a barricade of bread. Strange that no one had ever thought of it! There had never been a war that a barricade of bread could not have halted. Back and forth across the Atlantic his food-ships were plying. In Holland his warehouses were bulging—

He glanced at the sleeping face of Santa—sweet and sad as an avenging angel's. Her solution of injustice was simple: to slay the wrong-doer before he could do his wrong. It was her own suffering that had taught her this cruel mercy. If she, a half-caste, disinherited at birth, could so risk her soul's salvation for humanity—

He drew himself up sharply. He was turning visionary. At this rate he would end as a second Varensky. All his plans for capturing power would be thwarted. He had seen nothing as yet that would corroborate the Captain's disastrous prophecies.

At Stuttgart he watched the Captain receive another telegram. If the man had lied to him, what was his purpose? How much did he know? How much did he infer? Had his discovery that they were not married been an accident or had he led up to it by strategy? When Vienna was reached, it would be necessary to throw him off their track.

They were winding through blue valleys of the Bavarian Tyrol, steeped in the contentment of autumnal sunshine. Like eagles' nests, built high above pine-forests, he caught glimpses of *chalets* perched on narrow ledges. Here and there they passed villages, mere clusters of dolls' houses, childish and make-believe as memories of fairy-land. He began to smile at his mood of pessimism. Were Santa to waken, she would refute the Captain's bogey stories. He bent over her, tempted to rouse her. At last he shook her shoulder.

"Santa, don't be frightened. I want to ask you a question. What the Captain said wasn't true?"

She gazed up at him bewildered, dreams still in her eyes; then turned her face drowsily back to the pillow. "What wasn't true? I don't understand."

"The part about Prince Rogovich and blowing those starving wretches back with cannon."

She settled herself wearily. "I'm so terribly tired. I don't want to be reminded." And then, "It was whv I killed him; so that he shouldn't."

VIII

Darkness had long since gathered when they crossed the starvation-line into Austria. Perhaps it was no more than imagination, but he immediately became conscious of a vague depression. Glancing through the misty panes, he espied no signs of life—only bare fields, pollarded trees like gallows, and the sullen profiles of shrouded houses. No trains flashed by, going in the opposite direction. Wayside stations were shuttered. Night was a stagnant tank. In the all-pervading silence the sound of their own going was the only clamor.

It was not until they were nearing Vienna that any lights broke the monotony of the blackness—even these, like lanterns of lonely grave-diggers, were faint and rare. Shadowy apartment-houses and rotting factories looked less like habitations than monstrous sepulchers. It was difficult to believe that this pulseless carcass had once been the Bacchante among modern metropolises—that even at this moment memories of its rhythm were setting the feet of happier streets to music. He caught the vision of other cities after nightfall; New York, a tall white virgin, sheathed in jewels; London, a grimy smith, striking sparks from a giant anvil; Paris, a wanton

goddess, smiling through the dusk, her face lit up by fire-fly constellations. How impossible it would be to approach any one of them without becoming aware of its presence! Yet a man might easily travel through Vienna without suspecting that it lay cowering behind the darkness.

It was after midnight when the train halted in the empty cathedral of the Bahnhof. Directly the doors were opened, lean men poured into the compartments, whining for the privilege of handling the baggage. Hindwood delayed until he had allowed the Captain sufficient time to make his exit, then he thought it safe to assist Santa to the platform. Once again, despite the lateness of the hour, it was necessary to go through tedious formalities. The question asked most pressingly, as at the German frontier, was whether they were possessed of fire-arms.

At last they were free to go in search of beds. As they stepped into the station-yard, they got their first glimpse of Austria's destitution. Huddled against the walls was a collection of human derelicts which seemed more in keeping with Dante's "Inferno" than the city which had set the world waltzing to *The Merry Widow*. They were of all conditions and ages, from grandparents to toddling children, from artisans to aristocrats. In the scant light they lifted up greenish faces which snarled, while their extended hands demanded charity. The police beat them back, like huntsmen separating hounds from their quarry. They retreated whimpering into the shadows.

From the line of worn-out vehicles which were waiting, Hindwood selected a creaking taxi. Having seen Santa seat herself, he ordered the man to drive to the Hotel Bristol.

"Pretty awful," he groaned, as he sank back against the musty cushions.

She stifled a sob. "It was nothing. It's worse than that."

He spoke again. "I didn't see the Captain. I think we're rid of him."

"I wouldn't be optimistic."

Down the long, deserted Mariahilfer Strasse they bumped and rattled. It was ungarnished and forbidding as an empty house. The few people whom they met scuffled out of sight at sound of intrusion, looking less like human beings than vermin. Over all there hung a sense of evil, as though a crime lay undiscovered behind the silence.

As they turned into the Ring, which circles the inner city, Santa woke into animation. Leaning from the window, she pointed. "Do you see that huge pile like a palace, with all the statues and the steps going up to it? That's the Opera House. I danced there once at the command of the Emperor."

"Then you're known here?" He clutched her hand.

She shook her head sadly. "I was the toast of Europe then. Whereas to-day— It makes a difference."

In the Kärtner-Ring they drew up before a blazing entrance. Laughing people were passing

in and out, women muffled in costly wraps, accompanied by men in evening-attire.

"What's this?" The change was so sudden that it shook his sense of reality. "This doesn't look like—"

She placed her lips close to his ear as she alighted.

"It looks like asking for revolution. 'After me, the deluge'—you remember? The men aren't Austrians. They're foreign vultures here to snatch bargains—human bargains as well. But the women—"

Inside the doors of the hotel every reminder of famine had been blotted out. Its white marble halls and stairways were richly carpeted. Its furnishings in gilt and satin had been carried out with the utmost lavishness. The crystal of its chandeliers glittered with a dazzling intensity. From the restaurant drifted the wild gayety of a gipsy orchestra, enfevering the atmosphere with the yearning of elusive romance. Whispering to the beat of the music came the glide of dancing footsteps. Flunkeys with powdered heads, tricked out in plush breeches like marionettes, hurried to and fro on all-absorbing errands.

After Santa had been shown to her ornate room, he stepped out into the gloomy street to assure himself. It was all true, in spite of the lie which he had witnessed. The pinched faces were still there, and the enfeebled bodies crawling through the shadows.

As he reëntered the white glare which shone from the hotel, he glanced back with a sense of impending ruin. For a second time his mind was filled with a

tremendous picture: "And there was a certain rich man and a beggar named Lazarus, which was laid at his gate, desiring to be fed. Moreover, the dogs came and licked his sores."

He caught the vision of his food-ships piling up stores in Holland. At the thought, as he crept between the sheets in his comfortable bed, he sickened.

IX

He had returned from a disturbing interview with the Austrian ministers responsible for considering his proposals. He was passing the hotel desk, when it occurred to him that some one might have left a message. On inquiry two were handed out to him, one a telegram, the other a letter. Ripping open the telegram, a glance told him it was in German and had been dispatched from Budapest. He had slipped it into his pocket, thinking, "I'll have to get Santa to translate that," when he unfolded it again to see by whom it had been sent. The sender's name was a single word, "Anna."

His heart gave a bound. She was near to him! He could see her again within a handful of hours. For a moment nothing else seemed to matter—neither Santa's safety, nor the agony of hunger by which he was surrounded. His blood ran hot with yearning. How had she reached Budapest so quickly? What was her object? To have accomplished the journey she must have set out from

England ahead of him or else have left on the same day, traveling by the alternative route via Belgium. While he had been journeying in the company of Santa, going through the mummery of pretending he was married, Anna had been paralleling his footsteps. Was Varensky with her? But if she were alone . . .

Mechanically, as he entered the elevator, he slit the flap of the letter. It had evidently been left personally, for it bore no postmark and was hastily scrawled on the stationery of the hotel. The hand was unknown to him. The note read:

“Yesterday you avoided me. I have told her everything. I am more sure than ever you ought to send her back. I must leave you now for a little while. When we meet again, I hope it will be as friends.

LAJOS.”

At last they had got rid of him! But what was it he had told her? And what made him so sure that they would meet again? The man wrote as if he were confident that he could lay his hands on them at any moment.

Stepping out of the elevator, Hindwood made directly for Santa's room. He recalled it vaguely as he had seen it the night before, with its Empire furniture, painted cupids, silken hangings, and tall mirrors—its knowing air of having been the illicit nest of innumerable short-lived love-affairs. Its

gaudy luxury, so glaringly in contrast with the embittered need of the outside world, had stirred his anger. In reply to his knock, her hoarse voice bade him enter. Before he was across the threshold, he was aware of the intoxicating fragrance of roses.

Just inside the room, frowning with bewilderment, he halted. There were stacks of them—sheaves of them everywhere. They were scattered on the floor. They were arranged in vases. They lay strewn about in boxes. They were of all shades and varieties.

“What’s the meaning?”

She beckoned to him to join her at the tall window against which she was standing.

“We missed this last night.” She pointed.

Following her direction, he saw that the window looked down obliquely on the imposing architecture of the Opera House. The mellow October sunlight drifted softly across gray roofs and fell in an orange splash into the deep fissure of the street below. Along the pavements the tide of traffic wandered nervelessly. On a neighboring ledge, two plump pigeons were engaged in an ardent courtship.

“What did we miss? I see nothing.”

Then he noticed the panting of her bosom and that her expression was tender with tremulous emotion.

Drawing her fine fingers across her eyes, she shuddered. “Stupid of me! I forgot; they would bring back nothing to you—the scent of the roses and then the Opera House, looking the same as ever. I’ve been dreaming of other mornings, when I woke

after nights of triumph. Perhaps it was this room that set me remembering. It's not the first time I've slept in it." As she caught his eyes reading her memories, she flushed guiltily. "Yes, in those days I was never lonely."

"But the roses!" he reminded her impatiently. "How did you get them? At the price things cost in Vienna, some one must have spent a fortune."

She placed a hand on his arm appealingly. "Don't begrudge me. He must have known. I think he did it for my burial."

Her words sent a chill through him. He shifted his weight uncomfortably. "We're in too tight a corner to waste energy on sentiment. If we're going to make a fight for it, we've got to keep our heads clear. Who gave them to you?"

She pressed her forehead against the warm pane. The gold of the world outside cast a sheen of gold on her profile. Her unwanted loveliness hurt him. It reproached him. It recalled to him the ache of his old desire in the days before he had known that he could have her. And now that he could have her for the asking. . . .

"Captain Lajos gave them to me. They've been arriving ever since we parted. He waited till you'd gone; then he came to me. He came to tell me why he'd followed me. He was persuaded I was your mistress. This morning he did something noble—very noble for a man of his sort to a woman of mine; he begged me to become his wife."

"Without knowing anything about you? He must be mad."

"Don't say that." She closed her eyes painfully. "I shan't trouble you or any one much longer. I shall soon be so still. When one's sure of that, it's good to be loved just once again, even though—" She turned slowly and faced him. "I don't need to tell you who it is that I love truly. This man—he's nothing. No man ever will—— You see I've lived for men and admiration—for things like—" She pointed to the roses. "It's new to me to be neglected. So it's comforting to know that a man can still desire me, even though I'd rather kill myself than go with him."

He broke the silence that had settled between them. "You mustn't talk like this. You've years of life before you. I'll get you away safely."

She smiled. "No." Then she changed the subject. "What happened to you?"

"You mean at my conference?" He seated himself beside her dressing-table. "The worst that could have happened—nothing. Some change has taken place for which I can't account. When I sent my suggestions from America, they were hailed with enthusiasm. I was a saviour—everything that's splendid and extravagant. But now— The Government's paralyzed. It isn't a Government; it's a passenger. 'You've let us starve too long. It doesn't matter now—' that's what I was told this morning. The ministers with whom I consulted spoke as if they were sitting on the edge of a volcano, waiting

to be blown up. They're so sure that an eruption's inevitable that they don't consider it worth while to make an effort to save themselves. I couldn't rouse them. When I pressed them for the cause of their lethargy, they prophesied a new war, in very much the same words as Captain Lajos—a war in which the well-fed are to be pillaged by the starving."

"But did you tell them that you could ship food into Austria at once?"

"I told them. I assured them that I could put Austria back on her feet in twelve months. I offered to provision her and to supply coal for her factories, if they'd give me control of the railroads and a per capita percentage on the total increase of national industry. 'Provision us with pleasure' was their attitude; 'we'll raise no official objection.' 'Very kind of you,' I replied; 'but where do I come in. I'm no philanthropist.'" He brought his fist down with a bang on the dressing-table. "There's a nigger in the wood-pile. Upon my soul, I believe those fellows are determined that I shan't prevent their nation from dying. If I shipped them the food as a gift, they'd burn it."

She came over from the window and stood gazing down at him. "You're right. They would if they dared. Can't you guess?"

"I can't. Their currency's hardly worth the paper it's printed on. People are dropping dead in the streets—I saw them. Their gaols are packed with children turned criminals through hunger. There'll

be no crops next year; the grain's consumed that should have been saved for the sowing. They've butchered all their live-stock. The brains of the country are in exile. The intellectual classes have been wiped out. And here I come with my offer to save them, and they reject it. Without the help of some outside force like myself, things can only go from bad to worse."

"Precisely."

He glanced up, irritated by the promptitude of her agreement. "Precisely! Why do you say that?"

"It's what they want—things to go from bad to worse. The worse things get, the more certain they are of revolution. They're afraid your food would postpone it."

"Afraid! Why on earth?"

"Because they hope to snatch more out of the catastrophe of revolution than you can offer them. These ministers with whom you've been dealing are the tools of the exiled monarchists. They belong to the party in all countries which made the last war possible and all wars before it. What do they care for the people? They never have cared. 'Let the brutes starve,' they say, 'if it suits our purpose. We can always breed more.' They regard the people as their serfs, to be fooled with patriotism when danger threatens and to be kept in chains to toil for them when peace has been restored. If the people go hungry long enough, they'll reason that the loss of their kings is the cause. They'll rise up and recall them. They'll start to die for them *afresh*. It'll

happen in all the outcast countries. In the wholesale scramble, it'll be every nation for itself. The strong will struggle to expand their frontiers, and the weak will go to the wall. The deluge of blood—"She sank to her knees, seizing his hands imploringly. "If you'll sacrifice your stores of food, you can stop it."

"But if I do that, without guaranties, I'm bankrupt. I get nothing."

"You'll get more than I got when, to accomplish the same purpose, I murdered Prince Rogovich. I'll get the scaffold. You'll earn the thanks of humanity. You'll go down to the ages. . . ."

He could see only the wide grayness of her eyes, pleading, coercing, unbalancing his judgment.

He jumped to his feet, shaking off their spell. "I'm no dreamer—no Varensky," he said gruffly. "I have to make a profit." Then, defending himself from her unspoken accusation, "We're only guessing. We have no facts. There are other famished countries—Hungary and Poland. What Austria refuses, they may accept." He dug his hand into his pocket. "That reminds me. Here's a telegram from Budapest. I can't understand it. It's in German."

She was crouched on the floor. As he stooped to give it to her, she caught sight of the signature.

"From Anna. Varensky must be with her. Then the crisis is nearer than I thought."

"Read it. Tell me what it says," he urged.

She looked up palely, wilted with disappointment.

"*'Come at once. I need you.'* That's all."

“Does she give no address?”

“She wouldn’t risk it. I know where to find her.”

“Then we’ll start—”

“But what about—?”

He did not hear her. The blood was hammering in his temples. He left her forgotten, seated among her roses. The music of a wild exultation was maddening his heart.

CHAPTER THE SEVENTH

THE CAPTURE

I

SO Anna had turned to him out of all the world! She had felt so sure of him that she had not even stated the reason for her urgency—only “*Come at once. I need you.*” That she should have relied so implicitly on his compliance put him on his honor not to disappoint her. She must have known that her telegram would find him involved in important business. The earliest she could have counted on seeing him must have been to-morrow. He was determined, if it were humanly possible, to exceed her best expectations; he would see her to-night. Having phoned for the hotel porter to be sent to him, he immediately commenced to pack. He recalled the message that Santa had delivered him: “Varensky’s setting out on his last journey. He told me to say, ‘Soon you can have her.’” Did Anna’s telegram mean that Varensky’s final journey was ended?

He was throwing his belongings together when the porter entered.

“You wanted me, sir?”

“Yes. What’s the first train—the fastest to Budapest?”

"The first, if it's still running, starts from the Nord-Bahnhof within the hour. But—"

"Then order me a taxi. I'll be ready in ten minutes. Have my bill made up. Send some one to my secretary's room to fetch down her baggage."

"Certainly. But—"

Hindwood glanced at the man coldly. "I'm in too much of a hurry for conversation."

A little later, as he was pocketing his change, having settled his account, the cashier addressed him.

He shook his head. "Don't understand." Then, catching sight of Santa, he beckoned. "The fellow's trying to say something. Find out what's troubling him."

The cashier repeated more earnestly the words that he had previously uttered.

"He wants to know whether you really think you can leave Vienna," Santa translated.

"What's to prevent?" Then he caught her arm, lowering his voice. "Perhaps they're on to you."

The Kärtner-Ring was extraordinarily deserted. Against the curb a wheezing taxi was standing—the only one in sight. Its engine was running. The bags had been piled on the front seat beside the driver, evidently very much to his annoyance; he was doing his best to tumble them back on to the pavement. The hotel porter was vigorously restraining him. An altercation was in progress which threatened any minute to develop into a fight.

"What's the matter?"

The porter replied across his shoulder, still hold-

ing the bags in place. "He doesn't want to drive you."

"Tell him I'll give him five times the legal fare."

When the offer had been translated, the man seemed mollified.

The porter opened the door. "Quickly. Jump in before he changes his mind. He promises to do his best."

"His best! I should think so."

As the cab moved off, Hindwood missed the porter's parting words. He turned to Santa. "Do they always come this hold-up game with foreigners in Vienna?"

"It isn't a hold-up game. He didn't want to drive us. He was afraid. Something's wrong. Look how empty the streets are. Didn't you see how white and scared every one was in the hotel? The cashier would have told us; you wouldn't even let me listen to him."

"Jealous!" he thought. "It'll be awkward having to take care of both her and Anna."

They had driven for ten minutes in silence when Santa spoke again. "It's a queer way he's taking us."

"How queer?"

"So round-about."

"As long as he keeps going, we don't need to worry."

"But why should he turn up all the side-streets?"

"I don't know. It'll be time to grow nervous when he stops."

At that moment he stopped, but it was only for a second. Spinning his cab about, he spurred off in a new direction. Glancing from the window as he turned, they saw that the main thoroughfare ahead was blocked by what appeared to be a procession. Street after street he tried, working round in a circle, never getting any nearer. At last, growing desperate, he took the plunge, tooting his horn and forcing his way through the outskirts of the seething mob. By the time Hindwood had ordered him to turn back it was too late; for a hundred yards behind them, from pavement to pavement, the thoroughfare was packed with pedestrians and vehicles, all headed in the one direction. To get out and walk, even if they had been willing to sacrifice their baggage, was out of the question. The crowd in front was more dense than the crowd behind. The air was full of shrieks of fainting women and the shiver of plate-glass as shop-windows gave way under the pressure. To escape the crush, which was momentarily increasing, people were clambering to the roof of the taxi and standing thick along the running-boards.

Santa was speaking in a torrent to the strangers clinging to the doors.

"Can't you stop long enough to tell me what's happening?" Hindwood interrupted.

She apologized. "I forgot for the moment that you can't speak German. They're as puzzled as we are. All they know is that they're doing what every one else is doing. They don't know the cause. The same thing's happening at every station. A

panic's struck Vienna—a foreboding of disaster. It's a case of nerves. In some places looting has started. Every one's escaping—the entire population. It's anything to get westward to France, Switzerland, Germany, away from this nightmare of starvation. They're storming the trains in the Bahnhof, trying to compel the engineers to—”

Turning from him, she commenced to ply more questions in her hurried flow of German.

It was all clear now—the porter's hesitancy, the cashier's earnestness, the driver's reluctance. They had been trying to prevent him from hurrying a woman into danger. He had been too obsessed by the thought of reaching Anna even to pay attention. For confirmation of what Santa had told him, he had only to glance at the surrounding throng. The lean multitude was absurdly prepared for its futile exodus. Irrespective of class, every individual was burdened with whatever he or she had had time to rescue of the household goods. They carried bundles beneath their arms and sacks on their backs. Everything on wheels had been commandeered. Some pushed perambulators, piled high with ill-assorted belongings; others had harnessed themselves to carts. None of them could have considered whether his or her presence would be allowed in a happier country. Obviously over night the half of Vienna could not have procured the necessary permits to travel.

On the outskirts those who were most desperate, because furthest from the station, had begun to charge. Hindwood watched the stampede—how ter-

ror was transforming forlorn human beings into animals. They were of all kinds and sorts, mechanics, waiters, slum-dwellers, merchants, shop-girls, demi-mondaines, with here and there a sprinkling of patrician faces from the palaces of the bankrupt aristocracy. There were lonely men and women, but for the most part they were grouped in families, the children dragging at their mother's skirts and the youngest in the father's arms. They pushed, jostled and fought, trampling the weak in their frenzy to get forward.

Suddenly the madness of self-preservation froze with horror. At the end of the street, far up the pale river of gray faces, horsemen were advancing, standing tall in their stirrups, smiting with their swords. Santa flung herself to the floor. "Down. Keep down. The children—oh, my God!"

Like a volley of hail, bullets commenced to patter. They whipped the street from end to end, hissing in their flight and thudding as they found their target. The taxi tossed and rocked like a rowboat in a mill-race. The mob had given way; like water from a burst dam, it roared between the tall, confining houses. It swept backwards weeping, bleeding, desperate, exhausted, wilder in its retreat than it had been in its advance. Behind it came the cavalry, riding it down, firing and stabbing. In five minutes nothing was in sight, save upset vehicles, scattered belongings, dead lying awkwardly in the October sunshine and wounded crawling weakly in search of refuge.

Reaching through the shattered window, Hindwood tapped the driver's shoulder. "Drive on."

At the touch the man crumpled. There was a crimson blot in the center of his forehead.

Santa sat up, staring furiously. "If you'd not refused them bread—"

"I didn't."

"You did. You were only willing to sell."

Her eyes were blazing. Her hands were clenched. Her tears fell slowly. In the terrific silence which followed so much clamor, the street itself seemed to accuse him. Picking up their bags, he led the way to the station. Scenes such as the one he had witnessed might be happening in Budapest. There was no time to be lost.

"Find out whether it's possible to send a wire."

"Where to?" she asked suspiciously.

"To Amsterdam."

"What for?"

"Do you need to ask?"

After a hurried conversation with a scared official, she turned. "If it's to do with food, they'll accept it. The lines may be cut at any moment."

He dashed off his telegram. "*Crisis sooner than expected. Without delay start food-trains under armed guard for Budapest and Vienna.*"

It might spell bankruptcy for him—the ruin of all his plans. He rebelled against the improvidence of philanthropy, yet dimly he discerned the proportions of his chance. If he would, he could teach the world how wars could be stopped. As he watched the

message being dispatched, he wondered why he had sent it. Was he frightened by the sight of bloodshed, or angered, like Varensky, by an unjust display of force? Or had he sent it because this maelstrom of human agony swirled between him and the woman he loved, and food might prove to be the only means by which she could be rescued? He sought to explain his actions by business motives: if his food trains were actually on the spot, he could strike a better bargain with tottering governments.

II

The express for Budapest was several hours late. When at last it got under way, it carried few passengers. It was plunging straight into the heart of the danger, from which all the world which possessed the price of a fare was escaping.

Santa listened to and reported on the conversation of fellow-travelers. They were Hungarian officers returning to their regiments, to whom a fight spelt opportunity; they were husbands and fathers, careless of their own safety in their dread of what might be happening to their families; they were merchants and men of wealth, anxious to be at hand for the defense of their possessions. As the talk went on, the greatness of the risk grew increasingly obvious; it bred an atmosphere of free-masonry. Strangers accosted each other, exchanging views on the hazards; they crowded about the entrance of any

compartment where a speaker seemed possessed of accurate information. Most of what was said was no more than conjecture; much of it was utterly contradictory. One man asserted that the Bolsheviks were attacking all along the Russian front; another that Bolshevism had collapsed and the peasants were massacring. Another knew for certain that throughout Central Europe the Reds were rising; yet another that the Monarchists had sprung to arms and were marching. Every rumor or invention was accepted with equal credulity. Anything was possible. No one knew for certain either the magnitude or the cause of the rumored disaster. Only one fact seemed indisputable: somewhere further eastward had occurred a catastrophe of shattering proportions—a catastrophe in the tragedy of which each one of them would shortly be involved.

Hindwood turned away from the babel of voices to the autumn landscape gliding past the windows. It consisted as far as eye could stretch of unbounded, level fields, gridironed by straight, military roads, marked by avenues of pollarded trees, intersecting always at right angles. The fields were neglected. They told their own story of seed consumed, which should have been saved for sowing, and of cattle slaughtered. Over everything, despite the brilliant blueness of the sky, there hung an atmosphere of melancholy. Down white-penciled highways little groups were trekking, always in the one direction. They appeared crushed and harmless, more like insects, scarcely human. They limped for-

lornly, dragging carts and carrying children. They were the advance-guard of the army of starvation. Hindwood remembered the Captain's prophecy. "They'll march to the lands of plenty like Death swinging his scythe, like a pestilence, like gaunt wolves."

At the frontier, where the train crossed from Austria into Hungary, he gained his first lesson in the resistlessness of necessity. There had been an unequal battle, in which only one side had been armed. It appeared that the Austrian guards had tried to turn back the Hungarian fugitives. They had fired their rifles till their ammunition was exhausted; then they had sickened of the slaughter. Opposition had made no difference; the tide of fugitives had still pressed on. Misery had proved more potent than explosives; it had made death, if not desirable, at least negligible. Its meek persistence had conquered. The Austrian soldiery had revolted against their officers and stood with grounded arms, watching the stream of poverty trickling through the barrier of corpses.

"Like water finding its own level," Hindwood thought. It would be like this the world over, if something were not done at once to check it. The outcast nations lay one behind the other, like terraced avalanches, in an ascending scale of destitution—behind the Austrians the Hungarians, behind the Hungarians the Poles, behind the Poles the Russians, each a degree more agonized in its privation. Now that the movement had started it would go on,

sliding, filtering, settling, until the peoples of the earth had regained an economic level. The Dives nations, which had refused to share, would try to hold the Lazarus nations at bay by force. They would spray them with cannon. They would charge them with bayonets. They would bomb them, gas them, dig labyrinths of trenches. In the end, as had happened here, though the pariah portion of humanity was weaponless, the meek persistency of its misery would conquer. Careless of oblivion, it would press on. He alone could give the Dives nations a seventh hour chance; at the price of his financial ruin, he could prevent the deluge of famine from spreading by damming it with a wall of bread.

Darkness had fallen. The carriages were unlighted. The train was moving cautiously, jerking, stopping, starting, like a live thing scenting carnage. Scattered through the night camp-fires were burning. In the gloom conversation dragged on wearily with reiterated guesses.

He felt his hand clasped.

"What is it?" he whispered. "Frightened? You won't be caught now. You're as safe as the rest of us. No one'll have time to remember you."

"I wasn't thinking of myself."

"Then—?"

"Of you—that perhaps you were born for such a time as this."

"Ah!" He drew his breath. The echo of his own thought! "And perhaps you, too," he suggested.

She twisted herself, leaning her breast against his

arm. Glancing down through the darkness, he caught the tenderness in her eyes and the gleaming smoothness of her cheek and throat.

"I wish I could believe it," she said softly; "to stand beside you, making you strong. . . . You could never love me; but to stand beside you, when you rescue the world, that would mean redemption."

"When I rescue the world!" He laughed quietly. "I'm no Varensky. I came here to make money."

She swept aside his cynicism. "You were born for this moment. And I, an outcast woman whom the world has hunted, will help you. Perhaps I shall give my life for you." She spoke exultantly. "I, whom you have rejected."

"You exaggerate. Things may not be as bad as they appear. What we've seen may be no more than a local disturbance."

She refused to argue. "Be kind to me while we're together."

On the outskirts of Budapest they came to a halt. The air was tainted with a nauseating odor. Standing on a siding was a long line of freight-cars in process of being shunted. By the light of lanterns swung by men on the tracks, it was possible to see that the freight-cars were inhabited. Figures hung out of them thin as skeletons, entirely naked or clad in flapping rags. The passengers of the express had crowded to the windows, pointing, commenting, gesticulating.

Hindwood turned to Santa. "What is it?"

She answered bitterly. "The death train."

"But the people aren't dead."

"Not yet. They're families ruined by the war and by the peace. Some of them saw their homes burned by the Cossacks; others had their farms stolen to pay the Allies' debts. They're nobody's business. When you've reached the end of your tether in Hungary, you join the death train and die by inches. You have no food, no sanitation. Wherever you halt, you spread contagion. When things have grown too bad in one place, you're dragged to another." She swallowed down a sob. "The train's full of children—and you tell me that you came here to make money."

On arrival at Budapest they found the station picketed by soldiers. They were immediately conducted under an armed guard to an office where the purpose of their journey was investigated. When Hindwood had explained their errand—that it had to do with the food-supply—he was treated with courtesy and given his choice of hotels. Santa chose the Ritz. A military order was made out for their rooms. A safe-conduct was handed them. A rickety conveyance, with a lean horse between the shafts, was allotted to them. They were launched into a city quenched of lights, with a soldier seated beside the driver for protection.

The wide avenues down which they drove were deserted. They were still unaware of what had happened. They had not dared to ask, lest any slip of the tongue might lead to trouble. There were no signs of revolution in the thoroughfares. They were

hushed and reverent as the aisles of a cathedral. Every few hundred yards a mounted gendarme rode out to challenge them; then, seeing the soldier on the box, backed into the shadows. Only one disquieting incident occurred. The uneasiness which it caused was due to guilty memories rather than to any actual menace. As they were turning towards the Danube, they heard a sharp trotting behind them. A closed brougham swept past, drawn by a pair of high-stepping horses. The equipage was one which must formerly have belonged to the Royal Palace; it was the ghost of a forgotten splendor. Hindwood rose in his seat to watch it vanish. Then he saw something that made him catch his breath. Running between its wheels was a snow-white Russian wolf-hound.

Santa heard his commotion. "What's the excitement?"

"Nothing."

By the time she had raised herself to follow his glance, the hint of peril was gone. The next moment they were drawing up at the hotel.

III

Again as the door swung to behind them, they were greeted by sounds of merriment and dancing, only here the abandon was wilder than at Vienna. Hindwood saw at a glance that this was no assemblage of alien hucksters, drawn from all the world to

gather bargains. As regards the men, they were devil-may-care and smart, of the same type as Captain Lajos—the sort who would follow the game to the last throw of the dice. Many of them had made no attempt to disguise their profession; they were clad in gorgeous uniforms of Hungarian regiments long since ordered disbanded by the Allies. Their breasts were ablaze with Imperial decorations. They strode the marble floors with the clink of spurs and the rattling of swords. While they drugged the midnight hours with laughter and debauch, their faces were feverish with listening expectancy—the expectancy of an event for which they waited.

The women looked like captives of a raid. Some hung back timidly; some were bold with wine; all were weary and pinched with hunger. Like the men, they seemed only to be acting a part. In the midst of recklessness they would give way to distaste, as though remorseful of this way of combating starvation.

With the stench of the death train still in his nostrils, Hindwood stared at the spectacle in pity and disgust. “Fiddling while Rome is burning,” he muttered.

His elbow was jogged by a black-coated individual with the appeasing manners of a tailor.

“I understand English. What is it you desire?”

Hindwood swung round. “So much the better. I want what one usually wants at a hotel—accommodation.”

The man rubbed his hands. “Sorry, sir. We’re

full up. Every room, in fact every lounge is taken."

"You'll have to find something. I have a military order."

Having read it the man returned the slip of paper. "That's different. You're here on Government business—for the same purpose as these other gentlemen, I take it?"

Hindwood replied non-committally. "Yes, on Government business."

"In that case I'll give you a room in the basement—a servant's, my last. It's all I have to offer."

"But two rooms are necessary. I have my secretary with me—this lady."

The man shrugged his shoulders. "To demand the impossible is useless. To-morrow—who knows? If things happen, I may be able to give you more rooms than you require. For the present . . ."

Seeing that nothing was to be gained by arguing, Hindwood consented to the arrangement.

"The room will be my secretary's. If you'll lend me blankets, I'll find a place in the passage."

The room proved to be poor in the extreme—nothing but four bare walls and an iron cot. When he had turned the key he tiptoed over to Santa.

"What's this monstrous thing for which they're waiting—this something that may happen to-morrow?"

She placed her hands in his, as though she felt the need of protection. Her golden face was tragic. "War."

His common sense revolted. Though everything

seemed to prove her guess correct, he refused to accept it. "War! It can't be. What would any one gain by it? It was war that produced all this hideous mess—the death train and all that. Besides, how can people fight who can scarcely crawl? They have one foot in the grave already. Ten well-fed men could defeat a battalion. Whatever's in the wind, it isn't war. To launch a war requires money."

"With you it's always money. To launch this kind of a war requires nothing but despair."

Stepping back from him tempestuously, she flung herself full length on the cot. Her face was hidden, buried in the pillow. While she lay there tense, the sound of dance-music, advancing and retreating, tapped dreamily against the walls. It spoke to him of romance, of a woman he could love, and of passion snatched perilously before life ended, in a mysterious city after nightfall.

She had raised herself and was regarding him feverishly. Her red lips were parted as with thirst.

"I know you so well," she was saying softly; "I know you because I love you. You refuse to believe it's war because you wouldn't be able to sell and bargain. But it is war—the sort of war we saw at the frontier: a war in which weaponless millions will march to the overthrow of embattled thousands."

"You're unjust." He spoke patiently. "I'm unwilling to believe it's war because I can't see any reason for it."

"Any reason!" Her eyes became twin storms. "Would you require a reason if you'd seen your

children die for lack of bread? You'd perish gladly, if you could first tear the throat out of one person who was too well nourished."

He went and stood beside her, stooping over her, placing his hand against her forehead. "You're burning. You've been through too much. Get some rest. To-morrow we'll find Anna and perhaps Varsensky; it's more than likely they'll be able to tell us." He paused. "I know what makes you so relentless; it's your own dead child—"

Her arms shot up, dragging him down and nestling his face against her breast. "Oh, my man, it's not that. It's that I'm jealous for you—so afraid you may deceive yourself and miss your chance."

He stumbled back from the temptation of her yielding body and the comfort of her fragrant warmth.

"My chance is yours; we may both have been born for this moment."

Long after he had stretched himself outside her door, he felt that in the austerity of the four bare walls she still crouched watching from her bed.

IV

He slept restlessly. The music and the dancing rarely halted. Once when he roused, it was with the suffocating sense that a man was bending over him, fumbling at the handle of Santa's door. As he sat

up, he was convinced that the man looked back just before he vanished around the corner.

When he finally wakened, it was in the chill of dawn. He was surrounded by a ghostly stillness. Rising softly, he slipped down the passage and out into the public rooms of the hotel. It was as though a wizard had waved his wand. The merry-makers lay strewn about carelessly, wherever sleep had overtaken them. In the pale light of morning, robbed of animation, their faces showed waxlike and wan. Swords, which had clattered martially, sprawled grotesquely by crumpled bodies. Uniforms looked tarnished, dresses shabby. Girls, with their lips parted and their hair disordered, lay with heads stretched back in their lovers' arms. Over all was spread the weariness of folly.

Tiptoeing from group to group, he searched for the man who had tried Santa's door. Nowhere could he find him. Returning to her room, he tapped lightly. He was afraid to make more noise in that atmosphere of menace. Receiving no answer, he pushed the door stealthily and peered across the threshold. He had feared lest he might find her gone; there she lay curled up in her cot, her hair poured across her pillow, her face cushioned against her hollowed arm. Gray light falling from a narrow window clothed her with a lonely pathos. Bending over her, he shook her shoulder. "Santa."

She sat up with a start.

"Has it happened?"

"Not yet. They're sleeping like the dead."

"Then why—?"

"There's someone who knows us here. He tried your door. It makes me think we're watched. We can slip out now and hunt up Varensky. If we wait till later, we'll be followed."

Her pupils dilated, obscuring the grayness of her eyes; they became black pools, mirroring her terror. "To be caught with Varensky would mean death."

He seated himself on the edge of her cot. "I didn't think you knew what fear was. Don't be frightened. I'll protect you."

"Dear!" All of a sudden she had become intensely calm. "Did you think I was afraid for myself? Before many days, perhaps before to-day is out, it'll be you who'll need protecting. I beg you, don't go near Varensky."

"But—"

"Let me go myself," she implored. When he glanced away without replying, she rushed on impetuously. "Some one's got to take risks. I don't count. Your life must be spared."

With an effort he brought his gaze back. "There's Anna."

Instead of the explosion he had expected, her voice became gravely tender. "I forgot. You care for her as I care for you. I'm sorry."

Her feet slipped to the floor; he saw them marble white against the bare, scrubbed boards—beautiful as hands, the feet of a dancer. As he retreated, she smiled bravely, "You shan't wait long."

V

So far as they were aware, no one had noticed their departure. The deep breathing of the motley throng had been like the beat of a muffled engine. Even the night-porter, who should have been on guard, had collapsed across his desk with his face buried in his arms.

They had stepped out of the hotel into a pulseless street where mists from the Danube hung like cobwebs. Hindwood could not rid himself of the suspicion that they were followed. He glanced back repeatedly, drawing Santa sharply into doorways in attempt after attempt to trap the tracker. If a tracker there was, he never revealed himself. At last Hindwood realized that precautions were profitless. The cessation of their own footsteps gave ample warning. A pursuer had only to halt when they halted, to escape detection behind the fog.

They scarcely dared talk, and then only in brief whispers. It puzzled him how she could keep her direction. It was like tunneling a passage through chalk, which crumbled, yielded, and caved in as one went forward. The whole world dripped sullenly—unseen gutters, unseen trees, treacherous pavements. And there was always the drifting whiteness, pricking one's eyes as with little darts.

She had gone too far and turned back, feeling her way along the wall. Before a large double-door she paused and knocked. She rapped three times



peculiarly before a grill was slipped back and a question asked. The answer which she gave appeared to be the countersign. A smaller door in the double-door was opened and they entered.

The person who had admitted them was a new type to Hindwood: flat featured, fair-headed, blue-eyed, clad in a loose khaki shirt, which bulged like a blouse, and in a pair of baggy breeches which were tucked into high-boots, roomy as pouches. But it was the expression of the man that was most impressive—his brooding appearance of enormous patience. Santa spoke rapidly in a language which was neither German nor French. The man nodded and led the way across a gloomy courtyard, up stairs rotten with decay, into a stone corridor lined with stout forbidding doors.

“Is it a prison?” Hindwood whispered.

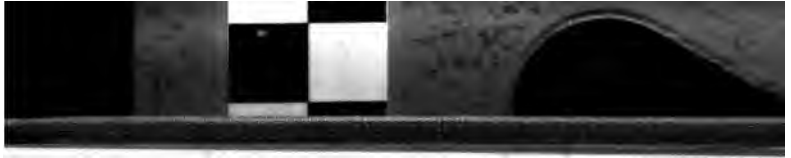
“Little better. It’s a barracks inhabited by the brains of outcast Russia—students, for the most part, male and female, who have escaped from the Red Terror. Russia has no use for brains at present. Brains are too dangerous. Wherever the Bolshevik finds them, he blows them out. Many of these exiles are survivors of Denikin’s and Kolchak’s armies. Having tried to save their country with rifles, they’re now preparing themselves to rescue her with knowledge. They’re learning to be doctors, engineers and lawyers, so that they may become the soul of the Russia of the future. Meanwhile they live anyhow, sleep anywhere and starve abominably. They’re not wanted in Hungary or in any European

country. They're suspected and hounded. The only reason they've been allotted this mildewed dwelling is in order that they may be watched."

The guide had thrown open a door and stood signing to them, trying to catch their attention.

It was a grim sight that met their eyes, similar to the one they had left behind at the hotel only a thousand times more sordid. The windows were locked and heavily barred. The air was poisonous. The room was stripped of furnishings. On bare boards innumerable human beings, without a shred of bedding, sprawled, drugged with sleep, herded together in indecent proximity. There was scarcely space to walk between them. They were of both sexes. Here and there a child lay folded in a parent's arms. The men were of all ages, but for the most part young and still in the tattered uniforms of their defeated armies. The women were scarcely distinguishable from the men. Their heads were cropped. They wore odd garments of mixed masculine and feminine attire, such as could be purchased for next to nothing at any rag-shop. Some retained the soldier-garb of the Battalions of Death. As Hindwood gazed across the pool of mud-colored faces, "Heaven help us, if this is the soul of the future Russia!" he thought.

Suddenly his interest shifted. In the corner remotest from the door, his eye had caught the shining of golden tresses. Their owner's face was turned away from him; they seemed to weigh her down and were piled beneath her head in a cushion. On



her left lay an aged peasant woman; on her right a man with a death-white face and a head that was peaked like a dunce's cap. The guide was already stooping over the man, touching him with a strange reverence. The man sat up. His green eyes opened. Hindwood experienced the same sensation of discomfort he had felt, when he had first seen them peering at him above the edge of the cliff at Seafold.

Varensky had risen. With his peculiarly catlike motion, he was picking a path towards them. He held out his hand.

"It was brave of you to come." And then to Santa, "Of you, too. But of you it was expected."

Hindwood bristled like a dog. He was distrustful of romantic attitudes. "Let's get down to facts. You know as well as I do that it wasn't any lofty motive that brought me."

"No?" The eye-brows arched themselves comically. "Then what?"

"Your wife's message."

"Ah! I understand. She didn't tell me. You see, she thinks I'm going to get myself killed at last; probably she wants you to help stop me. Not that I'm of the least use to her—don't think that. But she's the soul of honor. My death would mean her freedom; because of that she'd do anything in her power to prevent—"

Hindwood drew himself erect. "These are matters which it's not decent for us to discuss."

The narrow shoulders flew up into a shrug. "Why on earth not? When things are so, there can be

nothing indecent in being frank about them. Is it less indecent for you to love my wife than for me to tell that I know you love her? There'd be no sense in your loving her unless you both hoped—I won't finish what I was going to say; your feelings are so sensitive." He rested his hand not unkindly on Hindwood's arm. "Don't you realize, my dear fellow, that you're to be congratulated? This happening which means catastrophe for countless millions, for you and Anna spells opportunity. Be honest. You would not have risked visiting me, if you had not realized that."

Hindwood sought for spitefulness in Varensky's tones. All he found was the surge of a quiet happiness.

"One would think that I wanted you to die!" he exclaimed blankly.

"Well, don't you? Why shouldn't you?" Varensky smiled sadly. "If I could love Anna or any other woman the way you do— But no—to me such affections have been denied. I love people only in crowds, by tens of thousands and by nations; in my heart there's no room for more human passions. I'm God's instrument; the hour of my testing is at hand. These mildewed walls inclose my Gethsemane." He flung his arms apart grotesquely; they formed with his body the shape of a cross. The fire of fanaticism blazed in his eyes. "To-morrow I shall be crucified." He drew a shuddering breath.

"A born actor!" was Hindwood's silent comment. "An egoist who craves the lime-light."

And yet, to his chagrin, he found himself impressed. He was so deeply stirred that he dared not trust himself to speak for a moment; when he did, it was with calculated coldness.

"You think only of yourself. It's not you alone; even those of us who make no claim to be God's instruments, stand more than a sporting chance of being crucified, as you call it. There are Santa and Anna, for instance; there's the collection of wretched down-and-outs gathered in this building; there are the scarecrows I saw in the death train; there are all the teeming swarms of human lice crawling westward along a thousand roads. In the presence of an agony so widespread, I can't muster a tear for your individual tragedy. It's no time for theatrics."

For an instant Varensky's gaunt face quivered. Making an effort, with an air of mocking courtliness he mastered his injured pride.

"I was mistaken and I ask your pardon. We all have our plans to make ahead. I supposed you were here to ascertain approximately the hour at which I proposed to— Shall we say, depart?"

"You were badly mistaken," Hindwood cut in contemptuously. "I'm here to find out if there's any possible way in which we can save the situation."

"We!"

Varensky stared. He became rigid as though he were carved from marble. "We!" he repeated haughtily.

While Hindwood was searching for a clue to his amazement, his next words supplied it.

"I thought it was I who was to save the world."

"Splendid! You have a plan?"

Varensky's eyes filmed over. "Yes. But if I were to tell you, you wouldn't understand." Coming out of the clouds, he placed his hand tolerantly on Hindwood's shoulder. "Splendid, you said. So you want me to have a plan? Let's sit down and talk more quietly. These people are tired—in sleep they forget. So you also have ambitions to become a saviour?"

It was like the night in the hut all over again, when they had talked of Santa's redemption. There he sat, this discredited dictator, half-saint, half-charlatan, his knees drawn sharply up to his chin, his white face peering over them. The stale air sighed with the breathing of sleepers. A child whimpered and was hugged closer to the breast. In the far corner lay the desired woman. Gazing eagerly into both their eyes was the oriental countenance of the other woman, for whom neither of them cared.

"A saviour! No. I have no ambitions in that direction. But I have a scheme," Hindwood admitted.

"What is it?"

"Bread. I came to sell bread for trade-concessions. In Austria I found the Government unwilling to purchase. This morning, when I consult with Hungarian officials, I may be met with the same refusal. What's the game? Why should men in

control of hungry nations refuse my help? For six months they've been urging me to come to them. Something's happened—the signs of it are everywhere. Trains running westward are packed with women. The last sight we had of Vienna was a street-riot and people brutally shot down. And again at the frontier there were piles of dead—not only men: women and children who had been butchered to prevent them from escaping. Budapest's under military law. By some error, Santa and I on arrival were mistaken for conspirators in an army plot. We're billeted at what appears to be its headquarters—a place jammed with carousing officers of supposedly disbanded regiments. What's in the air? What is this dreadful news which some people rejoice over, from which others flee in panic, but which no one dares to mention? If you can tell me, I shall know how to act."

"If I can tell you—! Suppose I were to tell you the worst, how would you act then?"

"That depends. I'm no more unselfish than anybody else. At a pinch I could forget my own interests and ruin myself for the public welfare. Here's how I stand. I have enough food at my command to keep Europe for several weeks from actual starvation. If the crisis is genuine, that ought to give time for the conscience of the civilized world to be aroused. But even if the world's conscience should prove too sluggish, I still have a personal fortune which would keep hunger at bay for several months. I'm no philanthropist—I should make my-

self penniless reluctantly. I'm in no sense your rival for the honors of Calvary. My mission in Europe is to sell at a profit. So if you can do better——”

“What you're telling me,” Varensky interrupted, “is that, if by personal sacrifice you could avert a world disaster, you'd be willing to give something for nothing.”

“Precisely. But I must first be convinced that the circumstances warrant it.”

“There's one point you've overlooked.” Varensky's green eyes narrowed. “Up to the moment you entered this room, I was fully persuaded that I was the man on whom the privilege of paying the price must fall. I'd coveted the privilege. All my life I'd worked for it. If you rob me of it, have you reckoned the cost?”

“In money?”

“In something more valuable. If I live, you can never be Anna's husband.”

Hindwood hated the man for his subtlety. He was being deliberately tempted. He threw a glance toward the sleeping woman in the corner whose fate, as well as his own, he was deciding. Close to him, drawing nearer, he saw the pleading eyes of Santa. He gave his answer.

“I may be the man who was born for this moment. Play fair by me; tell me what's happened.”

Varensky rocked himself slowly back and forth. Suddenly he came to rest.

“I'm the thing that's happened. I'm responsible for everything. I've never learnt to let bad alone;

in trying to make things better, I make them worse. It was my hand that shot down the crowd at Vienna. It was I who butchered the women and children at the frontier. I'm the force which drives behind the human lice who crawl westward along a thousand roads. You think me mad; but listen. Every freedom gained entails a new bondage. I helped to free Russia from the Czar; in so doing, I prepared the way for Bolshevism. I've fought Bolshevism with my dreams, my happiness, with everything I possess. Bolshevism is overthrown. What have I produced? Chaos."

"Overthrown! Then that's the meaning of it." Santa had half risen.

Varensky turned his death-white face on her, chilling her enthusiasm. "It's collapsed like a pack of cards. With it have vanished the last of the restraints. Every Russian's his own master now to choose his own ditch in which to perish. We've destroyed a vision that turned out to be a nightmare, but we've set up nothing in its stead. We, who are idealists, have worked the final disillusion. We've made two hundred millions hopeless. They're fleeing from the emptiness. The contagion of their despair is spreading. You saw its results in Vienna. It runs ahead of them; they're already on the march. They've broken into Poland. They're drawing nearer. How to stop them——?"

Hindwood's lips had squared themselves. "I can stop them. My food-trains will be here by tomorrow. What hungry men need is not political

programs, but bread." Then he added thoughtfully, "I can stop them, if I'm not prevented. There's some one who's playing a different game; he's some one who wants the world to starve. That's what Austria's refusal meant; that's the meaning of these secret signs of rejoicing. He's bigger than any nation. Who is he?"

Varensky shook his head. "There was a man." He looked knowingly at Santa. "He was drowned."

Hindwood jumped to his feet as though there was no time to be lost. "I'm going to find out. I have an appointment with the Governor of Hungary. If he rejects my offer, I shall demand——"

"And if he refuses——?"

"I shall play my winning-card. Don't ask me what it is. But if I play it, I shall need your help. You've talked of crucifixion: I may provide you with the chance. How many of these——?" He pointed to the sleeping outcasts.

Varensky's eyes were shining. "I've four hundred: three hundred veterans of Denikin's and Kolchak's armies and a hundred girl-soldiers of the Battalions of Death."

"Have them warned."

As he turned on his heel, he saw that Anna had wakened. She cried out after him. He dared not face her. Leaping down the stairs, he went at a run across the courtyard. It was only when the door into the street had closed behind him, that he realized that Santa was panting at his elbow.

VI

Mists were clearing. The sun had emerged fiery above a mountain-range of clouds. As they hurried in search of their hotel, they caught glimpses of the Danube, spanned by many bridges, and on the further bank the palace-crowned heights of Buda. The ancient city looked imperially beautiful. There was a touch of the East about it, a lavishness and rose-tinted whiteness. Its quays and pavements shone wet, as though they had been daubed with lacquer. It seemed incredible that behind its gold-splashed walls the ghosts of hunger gathered.

During their absence from the Ritz, a transformation had been effected. All signs of disorder had been banished. In place of the untimely Bacchanalians, stiff-bosomed waiters stood guard over neat tables with a solicitous air which was bewilderingly normal. Even the breakfast menu gave the lie to starvation.

They took their seats in silence, eating without interest whatever was set before them. Hindwood's sensations were those of a man who has given way to his emotions at a theatre. It was as though the lights had gone up, shaming him in public. There had been nothing to warrant his surrender to sentiment. He totaled up the accumulated incentives: he had witnessed a street-riot, people slain at the frontier, the hideous contrast between the death train and dancing—and last of all Varensky. But

these things in themselves constituted no argument; the cause that lay behind them was still conjectural. As for Varensky, whatever he had said was unreliable. His wish was parent to his thought. He was a man born to stir up turbulences, which he considered it his mission to pacify. He was dangerous as a forest-fire: one spark of his wild idealism made the whole world lurid. In the breath of adversity he became a sheet of flame, destructive and self-destroying. His goal was the vanishing-point, in the No Man's Land between desire and things attainable.

Hindwood writhed at remembering the ease with which his judgment had been unseated. In his weakness he had given a promise, which it would be folly to fulfill and dishonorable to withdraw. He glanced across at Santa. How was she taking this return to normality?

She met his eyes with passionate adoration. "It was god-like of you."

He pretended ignorance. "What?"

"Your self-denial. You've given up everything—Anna, ambition, money—all the things you worship."

He assumed a judicial expression. "Perhaps not. It mayn't be necessary."

"But it will."

"If it is," he said, "I shall stick to my contract. But I've reason to believe we've exaggerated."

"Would to God we had!"

Her fervor disturbed him. He leaned across the

table. "You don't mean to tell me you accept this bogey story about starving millions marching? There's a sense of security this morning. Surely you must have felt it?"

She shook her head. "We've had a meal—that's all. Within a mile from here I could show you a hospital where five hundred babies sit shivering like monkeys. They're wrapped in paper; they've never known what it was not to be hungry from the day they were born. I could take you to the workmen's quarter, where naked men and women would squirm at your feet like dogs; they're too weak to walk. I could lead you past the bread-lines, already forming——"

He stayed her by covering her hand. "I'm not denying it. When countries make wars they have to pay penalties."

The storm that was brewing betrayed itself in her eyes. "What are you denying?"

"Don't let's make a scene," he urged. "My promise holds if I find that circumstances warrant it. In a little while I'm seeing the Governor of Hungary; after that I'll be sure. While I'm gone, I have one request to make of you: keep your room and talk to nobody."

She rose from the table in suppressed defiance. "Why?"

"For your own safety. It was lucky I slept across your threshold last night. Your door was tried."

Her smile accused him. "By whom?"

"If I'm not mistaken, by the man who afterwards tracked us through the fog."

She turned away as though she were finished with him. When she found that he was following, she delivered a parting shot. "You told me this to frighten me. Did you think you could make me your accomplice in cowardice?"

VII

So these were the rewards of knight-errantry! In his anger he was glad to be rid of her. He was free at last. She'd been nothing but an embarrassment. If she were to attempt a reconciliation, he would turn his back on her. It wasn't likely that he'd put his neck into the same noose twice.

Little by little from resenting her, he began to suspect her. Had she been using him as a cat's-paw in a deeper game? Every man with whom she had ever associated, she had destroyed; could she be expected to show more mercy to a man by whom she had been rejected? Her husband's words came back: "When she has added you to her list of victims, if she gives you time before she kills you, remember that I warned you."

Everything to do with her became distorted when interpreted in the light of treachery. The pathos of her unrequited affection had been a mask; her humanitarianism had been a cloak for her designs. When he retraced his relations with her, it seemed

glaringly probable that from the start she had been the agent of his financial rivals, placed by them on board the *Ryndam* with the definite intention of accomplishing his ruin. Except for her final error in tactics, she would have attained her object. He had escaped by the narrowest of margins.

But the other people who had come upon the scene, where did they stand? Were they her puppets, jumping whichever way she pulled the wires, or were they her active co-conspirators? Varensky and the Little Grandmother were undoubtedly her puppets; she employed their enthusiasms to serve her purposes. Anna was her victim—a woman wronged and cheated, infinitely dear to him and tragic. It was Captain Lajos who troubled him. The more he thought about him, the more certain he became that the Captain and Santa were hand in glove. The farce which they had enacted on the train had been prearranged with a view to intimidating him. His most unnerving information, concerning the menace of starving millions, had come from the Captain. And there was a further fact, which had been disquieting him all morning: it was Captain Lajos who had tried Santa's door last night.

What did they think to gain by their plotting? Having pondered the conundrum, he decided that their object was to thwart his schemes for grasping world-power, and that the means they had chosen were to compel him to give for nothing the hoards of food which he had intended that Europe should buy.

Well aware that this theory was far from covering all the facts, he was still feeling his way through a quagmire of surmise, when a visitor was announced. In the foyer he found an officer, resplendently uniformed, waiting to escort him to his audience at the Royal Palace. He was whizzed away in a handsome car. As he traveled, his companion entertained him with anecdotes, grimly humorous, of Bela Kun's reign of terror.

"Experiments of that sort soon disprove themselves," he said cheerfully. "We live through them and go on again."

"And your country is going on again?" Hindwood inquired.

"Emphatically. Signs of revival are already apparent."

"But what about Russia? How's revival possible without security?"

The officer laughed carelessly. "I catch your meaning; you've heard this latest about Bolshevism's downfall. In our part of the world we pay no heed to rumors; they're inventions of political opportunists or of gamblers in the international exchange. Even if this latest is true, it's the best thing that could have happened."

Hindwood twisted in his seat that he might lose nothing of his companion's expression. "The best thing in the long run—that's granted. But meanwhile, because of the breakdown in organization, over a hundred million Russians are likely to die."

Again the officer laughed, stretching his long

legs. "The fittest will survive. One has to die somehow. The last war was fought because the world was too crowded. Famine's nature's cure for overpopulation."

The remark sounded singularly ill-timed, coming from a man whose country was also starving. Hindwood frowned. "A heartless cure and, thank goodness, not the only one."

"Not more heartless than civilized society's, which encourages armed nations to strangle each other with every filthy invention of science. When you forbid Nature to correct matters in her own way, sooner or later you find yourself with a war on your hands. The matter's very simple: so many mouths to fill and so many rations. When the mouths are in excess of the rations, some one has to go short. The people who are selected to go short can either drop in their tracks or fight. If they fight and win, the result's the same—some one else has to go without. The adjustment's automatic."

"The thought of death," Hindwood suggested quietly, "especially of other people's death, doesn't seem to trouble you."

"That's natural. Killing and dying are my trade."

Brutal as was the point of view, after Santa's sentimental fallacies, there was something honest and direct about these bald assertions.

Hindwood spoke again. "What applies to Russia, applies equally to Hungary. My errand at the Palace is to offer sufficient food to keep your coun-

try alive. According to your theory, I'm interfering with Nature's laws. I'm doing something economically immoral. I ought to leave you to your fate."

To his amazement he was met with a polite concurrence. "That's how I regard it."

It was impossible to credit the man's sincerity. Hindwood glanced aside, irritated and shocked. He was seeking a motive for such disinterested frankness. There was nothing more to say.

He had been so much absorbed in the conversation that he had not noticed their direction. They were skimming high above the Danube, crossing a bridge that spanned the sunlit gulf in giant strides. Behind lay Pest, modern as a second Paris; in front lay Buda, ancient and scarcely Christian, still bearing the marks of its Turkish occupation. On reaching the further bank, the ascent to the Palace begun to climb.

It was just as they were reaching the top that Hindwood was for a second time startled by the ghost of memory. Peering down on him from the ramparts, with its head between its paws, was a snow-white Russian wolf-hound. The next moment they had passed beneath an arch, between saluting sentries, and had halted in the Palace-yard.

VIII

The Yard was an immobile sea of faces. As far as eye could reach, soldiers were drawn up in

close formation. It was clear that this was no ceremonial parade. The men were in full marching order; their field-kitchens were smoking in the background. They had the look of troops equipped for action, expecting to take the offensive at any moment. This much he saw as he was hurried into the Palace, before the great doors clanged behind him.

He found himself on the threshold of a magnificence that he had not imagined existed. Everywhere his eyes rested, they encountered riches accumulated through the centuries. Pictures and tapestries gazed down on him from the walls, chronicling the glory of the bygone Hapsburgs. Suits of mail, gold-inlaid and gem-studded, stood like knights of old, leaning on their swords. He followed his escort up a marble staircase, along endless corridors, from which doors opened into silent apartments, giving yet fresh vistas of royal splendors.

At last, in the far distance, the passage was blocked by a gigantic figure that might have escaped from Grand Opera; it stood so stiff and motionless that he mistook it for a wax-work. It was garbed as a halberdier, in parti-colored hose and shining armor. Only when the eyes moved did he realize that he was gazing at one of the Palace-guards. When the password had been given, they were allowed to slip behind a curtain. In the ante-room he was told to wait. His escort vanished through the inner-doors. A moment later the doors reopened and his escort beckoned.

He was aware of a blaze of light, lofty walls, tall windows, a tapestried room ornately furnished and a treacherously polished expanse of floor. A man was rising from behind an ormolu table. He was a man utterly simple and modern—the last man one would have expected to find in the pomp of medieval surroundings. His face was clean-shaven, bluff and wind-tanned. In his navy-blue suit he looked more like a yachtsman than the Governor of a State.

He was approaching with his hand outstretched. "I couldn't do less than receive you," he was saying.

The words, though spoken pleasantly, sounded like a dismissal.

"Perhaps your Excellency has forgotten the purpose of my errand?"

"Not in the least. Let's sit down; we can talk more informally. The trouble is that you've come too late. Crises as acute as ours have a knack of settling themselves."

Hindwood accepted a cigarette that was proffered. He took his time while he lit it. "Your solution is mustering in the Palace-yard. My food-supplies are no longer needed. Is that what you intend me to understand?"

"Exactly."

"Your Excellency spoke just now of crises settling themselves. Did you mean that so many of your countrymen have died that at last there's sufficient food to go round?"

"Far from it. Our shortage is greater than ever."

"I judged as much." Hindwood tapped his ash

casually. "I only arrived last night, but in the time I've been in Budapest I've seen the death-train, the bread-lines, the utter destitution. I've reason to believe that Bolshevism has collapsed and that millions of outcast Russians are marching. They're moving westward."

He paused, himself skeptical of the preposterous assertion he was about to make. Then he remembered the words he had learnt from Captain Lajos and repeated them like a lesson.

"They're sweeping westward like a pestilence. They're loping like gaunt wolves. They're drawing nearer, like Death swinging his scythe. Poland will go down before them first. Its famished people will join them. Your turn will come next. The march will never halt till the empty bellies have been filled. They can't be filled till the whole of Europe has been swamped by revolution, unless——" He paused again, waiting for encouragement. When the steady gray eyes still regarded him attentively, he continued, "Unless I fill them."

"Or unless," said his Excellency like a man commenting on the weather, "I destroy them."

There was a deep quiet. So Varensky had been a true prophet. It was the end of the world they were discussing—the end of truth, justice, mercy, everything that was kind.

Across the silence a bugle-call spurted like a stream of blood.

"You see my position?" his Excellency resumed reasonably. "If I buy from you, I prolong the

agony; worse still, I run my country further into debt. If I give the call to arms, many of us will die; but it's better to die fighting than from hunger. Besides, in the topsy-turvydom of war, who knows, we may find ourselves arrayed on the winning side."

Hindwood was too stunned to think quickly. He was still refusing to believe the worst. "I miss your point. Would your Excellency mind explaining?"

"My point's simple enough. The condition of Hungary and of the whole of Central Europe is due to two causes: the first that we made a world-war; the second that we lost it. The victors had a right to exact a penalty, but look at what they've done. We were exhausted; nevertheless, if they'd told us what we owed them, we'd have paid them. Instead of that, they cloaked revenge with idealism. They constituted themselves evangelists, fore-ordained to reform us. With their gospel of self-determination, they gave every racial hostility within our borders a voice. They carved us up into bickering factions, which they called nations, and bestowed on them the power to make themselves annoying behind new frontiers. They dipped their hands into our national resources and made gifts to their favorites. Transylvania was our granary; it went to Rumania. Bohemia was our coal-supply; the Czechs have it. Hungary is no longer self-supporting. We have our factories, but no fuel to run them; our skilled workmen, but no means of employing them. On every side we're fenced in by mushroom democracies drawing sustenance from what was once our body. The

wrong they have done us is the motive of their hate. We European countries fall into three categories: the robbers, the receivers of stolen goods and the pillaged. There's no intercourse between us; confidence is at an end. Our currency has become worthless as the paper on which it's printed. There's no flow of trade. We each have too much of one commodity and none whatsoever of others—too many factories here, too much wheat there, too much coal in another place. We're rival storekeepers, overstocked in certain lines, who refuse to take down our shutters. If we could forget our quarrels and club together, we'd have all the means of life. We deserve our fate, you'll say. But no—it was the Allies' surgeons who carved us into impotence and on top of that imposed indemnities. We have nothing to eat, so we prefer to fight."

"But what do you gain by it?"

His Excellency smiled. "Everything or nothing. We can't be worse off. The Russian menace may prove to be our salvation. The Red Terror has vanished; the Famine Terror has taken its place. If the starving hordes pouring westwards aren't halted, civilization will be blotted out by savagery. And who's to halt them? Not the Allies. Their common people are rebellious; they know that in the last war they were as much cheated and exploited as any of the enemy whom they routed. And not their politicians and profiteers; they're too bloated with their spoils. It's the story of Rome repeating itself. The obesity which follows victory

has conquered the conquerors. Their fighting days are ended; they'll have to hire mercenaries. The only mercenaries available are the nations they have trampled. Hungary holds herself for hire at a price."

"What price?"

"The restoration of her old frontiers."

Hindwood spoke eagerly. "No one shall die. We've had enough of dying. I have a better solution—bread. My food-trains should be arriving to-night or to-morrow. I wired for them before I left Vienna. I'll build a wall of bread from the Black Sea to the Baltic."

"And who'll pay you?"

"No one."

The answer had been totally unexpected. His Excellency glanced sharply across his shoulder as though seeking advice. Hindwood followed his direction and saw to his amazement that the tapestry, hanging behind the ormolu table, was agitated. Throughout the interview an unseen audience had been present. His Excellency turned back.

"You shall neither give nor sell. I may admire your humanity, but in Hungary I forbid you to build what you so picturesquely call your wall of bread. Austria, as I know, has already refused you; in Poland you will receive the same answer. Things have advanced too far for there to be any harm in telling you; moreover, I owe it to you to be frank. I represent a class which the democracy of the Allies has totally disinherited—the class of the

landed gentry and the old nobility. However matters might improve in our respective countries, our lot would be in no way benefited. The Peace of the Allies uprooted aristocracy and planted in its stead a raw Republicanism. The estates of men like myself, whether Austrian, Polish, Russian or Hungarian, have been in our families for centuries. They were grants from Kings for loyalty and services. Now that our Kings have been sent into exile, our entire status is in jeopardy. Our rank and privileges have become a jest. To-morrow or the next day, where it has not happened already, we shall join our Kings in banishment; our wealth will be confiscated. The excuse of a new war is the chance of European Monarchists. Banded together, we may snatch back our authority and set up the thrones which the Allies have toppled. So long as the people starve, they will follow us. Monarchy is the symbol of their lost contentment; they'll fight for it if we make its restoration their battle-cry. But if once we were to allow you to give them bread——”

Hindwood sprang to his feet. The time had come to play his winning-card. “They would lay down their arms,” he cried triumphantly. “They shall lay them down. By to-morrow they shall be fed.”

Again the tapestry rustled. For a moment it seemed that some one was about to disclose himself. Then all grew quiet.

“I have given you your answer,” said his Excellency.

Hindwood laughed. "And I can force your hand. I shall appeal to the people over your head."

Without further ceremony, he swung round on his heel and departed.

On regaining the hotel he went in search of Santa. She was not there. He betook himself to her room to await her coming. One hour, two hours slipped by. He began to be anxious. In the appearance of the room there was nothing to distress him; all her belongings were intact. When he made inquiries of the hotel staff, they professed entire ignorance of her whereabouts.

Apart from the concern he felt for her safety, she was utterly essential to his plans. It was necessary that he should get in touch with Varensky; without Varensky and his four hundred veterans he was helpless. When his food-trains arrived, he would need them. He made repeated efforts to rediscover the mildewed barracks; every time he missed his direction. For fear of spies, he did not dare to ask; he remembered Santa's warning, that to be seen with Varensky meant death. Day faded. Darkness fell. She had not returned.

It was nearing midnight when word reached him that the first of his trains was in the freight-yard. It had been given the right of way from Holland and had been rushed straight through under an armed guard. He was powerless to turn the information to account. Wearied with anxiety, he had begun to prepare for bed, when, without knocking, the door



THE CAPTURE

318

was burst open. Captain Lajos entered. His face was haggard. He was fierce and breathless.

“You’ve heard?”

“I’ve heard nothing.”

“She’s been captured.”

“By whom?”

“Prince Rogovich.”

Hindwood clapped his hand to his forehead. Either he or this man was mad.

“It’s impossible. Rogovich is dead.”

“And I tell you he’s at the Palace. He was there behind the tapestry this morning. She’s with him now and he’s torturing her.”

“Then why are you here, if you care for her so much?”

“That you may help me rescue her.”

CHAPTER THE EIGHTH

THE VANISHING POINT

I

SPURRED into haste by the Captain's air of calamity, Hindwood had commenced to dress. During the few minutes that it took him to hurry into his clothes he thought furiously; with the result that by the time he was clad for departure, he seated himself obstinately on the edge of the bed. Meanwhile, in the belief that he was being followed, the Captain had led the way into the passage. He had now returned and stood filling the doorway, a turbulent figure in his gorgeous uniform of the Royal Hussars.

"There's no time to lose," he rapped out.

Hindwood eyed him calmly. "If you were sent to execute me, you can do it here as conveniently as anywhere else."

The sheer amazement which greeted this accusation seemed to disprove its accuracy. The Captain answered scornfully:

"What devil of contrariness has put that thought into your head? If my errand were known, it would be I who would be executed. She's in love with you—that's why I sought you. It's the fact that you're

my rival in her affections that makes you the one man in Budapest whom I can trust. There'll be bloodshed——”

“Go slower,” Hindwood interrupted. “Put yourself in my place. You know too much—far more than seems healthy. You know that this morning when I was with the Governor, there was an unseen listener behind the tapestry. You assert, that he was a man whom all the world believes to be dead. If you'll think back to our journey from Calais, you'll remember that the reason for his having been murdered formed your chief topic of conversation. Seeing that you know so much, you're probably aware that my interview with the Governor ended in a threat. To make that threat effective, the cooperation of the woman whom you first supposed to be my wife and afterwards discovered to be my secretary is absolutely necessary. On my return from the Palace she had vanished. Here again, you pretend to know more than I do; at close on midnight you come bursting into my room, demanding that I accompany you to her rescue.”

The Captain stared dully. “Every second counts. What is it that you wish me to tell?”

“Why you've hung on my trail from Calais until now.”

“Eh!” His expression became embarrassed; then he raised his head with a fearless gesture. “I see what you're driving at. I acknowledge that my movements are open to misinterpretation. But I didn't follow you; it was she whom I followed. As

I told you in our first conversation, I was returning from England where I'd been sent by my Government to intercept Prince Rogovich with important despatches. The moment I clapped my eyes on your traveling companion, I recognized in her a startling resemblance; it was to a woman I had adored. She was far beyond me—the mistress of archdukes and for a brief while of an emperor. The nearest I ever came to touching her was when I was swept by her train at Court functions." He paused dramatically. "During the war she was shot by the enemies of my country. Infamous things were said of her. If they were true, they would make no difference to my love. No difference, do you understand?" Again he paused. "What else?"

Hindwood narrowed his eyes. "Each time I've met you, you've harped on the same theme—Prince Rogovich. Up to now I've not thought it necessary to tell you: I knew this Prince Rogovich. Besides myself, there was probably only one other person who spoke with him before his end. What makes you so certain that it was a man, presumed to have been drowned in the English Channel, who spied on me this morning from behind the tapestry?"

"I was beside him. I'm his bodyguard—if you like, his secretary. I've just come from him. Can you have stronger proof than that?" Suddenly the Captain's patience broke down. "How many more questions? God knows what's happening."

Hindwood had risen. "There are several. Why did he disappear?"

"He has not said."

"What makes you require my help to rescue her?"

"He may kill me. It's not likely he'll kill both of us."

"What's his motive?" Hindwood spoke more slowly. All his suspicion was emphasized in his words. "What's his motive for kidnaping this woman who resembles——"

"How can I tell?" The Captain was desperate. "We talk and talk while time passes. I suppose his interest is the same in this woman as in all women. Perhaps he was the discarded lover of that other woman, and, like myself, has noticed the resemblance."

Hindwood picked up his hat. "I'm coming."

"Are you armed?"

"Not in your sense. I shall fight with a different sort of weapon."

II

At the door a closed vehicle was standing. To Hindwood it seemed the one that had flashed by him on the previous evening. He glanced between the wheels; there was no Russian wolf-hound. Even before he was seated, the lash had been laid across the horses' backs. The next moment they were galloping down the gloomy street. Leaning from the window, the Captain was urging the coachman to drive faster.

When the pace had settled to a rapid trot, Hindwood broke the silence.

"You're an Hungarian officer; Prince Rogovich is a Polish statesman. You tell me you're his secretary. What's a Polish statesman doing in the Royal Palace, directing Hungary's affairs?"

"It isn't Hungary's affairs that he's directing; it's the campaign against Democracy. The present crisis has made Budapest the jumping-off point for the offensive which the Monarchists have been waiting to launch. The Monarchists are men of every country, who have sunk their nationalities and made a common cause."

"And you—are you a Monarchist?"

His reply came muffled. "I was. To-night I'm a traitor."

The horses, thrown sharply back on their haunches, swerved toward the pavement; the carriage jerked to a halt. Almost brushing the wheels in the narrow street, a column of soldiers shuffled past. Their rifles were slung at all angles. Their shoulders were bowed beneath their heavy packs. They crawled weakly, more like stragglers retreating than storm-troops advancing. Even in the darkness their bones showed pointed and their faces lean with famine.

"Reservists," the Captain explained shortly. "Mobilization has begun."

Hindwood strained through the gloom, touching his arm excitedly. "Starving men being sent to kill men who are more starving. You've spoken of a



THE VANISHING POINT 319

woman you adored—a woman who was shot for hideous treacheries. Her treacheries were committed to prevent just such crimes as that. Don't interrupt me—not yet. You've expected me to believe an impossible story: that a man can return from the dead. If I were to tell you an equally improbable story, what difference would it make to your love? If I were to tell you that the resemblance was not mistaken and that the woman at the Palace is the same as she who was reported executed in the woods of Vincennes?"

The last of the column had slouched into the blackness. The horses leapt forward impatiently. The question was repeated. "What difference?" The Captain's voice burst from him. "God forgive me—none."

Neither of them dared to trust the other. Their respite was growing shorter. They had crossed the bridge above the Danube. In a moment the ascent to the Palace would commence. It was Hindwood who decided on boldness. If he were walking into an ambush, he could not make matters worse.

He said, "Weapons will be useless. Only to kill the Prince won't save her. If we manage to escape from the Palace, the streets are full of armed men. We should only rescue her to die with her. I have a plan. Do you know the barracks of the Russian refugees? If I were to write a note, would you guarantee to have it delivered?"

By the light of matches held by the Captain, he scrawled rapidly. The last sentence read, "If you

have not heard from me again by 2 A. M., consider that the worst has happened and carry out these instructions." He addressed the note to, "*The Husband of Anna.*"

"Have it entrusted to a man who cannot read English." The Captain extinguished the final match.

"I shall send it by the driver of this carriage."

III

They had alighted some distance short of the gateway where the sentries would be on guard. The message for Varensky had been handed over. The horses had been wheeled about; save for their trotting growing fainter down the slope, the night was without a sound. The moon shone fitfully. Stars were obscured. The city out of which they had climbed lay pulseless in an unilluminated pit of blackness. The Palace, piled high above them, loomed sepulchral.

The Captain groped his way beneath the wall of the ramparts, searching for something which at last he found. It pushed inwards at his touch. The door closed behind them.

In the intenser darkness Hindwood stretched out his hands. They encountered the rough surface of clammy masonry. He was in some sort of a tunnel. The floor sloped gradually upwards. The atmosphere smelt dank. He spoke. Getting no answer, he held his breath. Going away from him

he heard the stealthy hurrying of the Captain's footfall. Rather than be left, perhaps to be forgotten, he started forward at a blundering run. He came to steps. He was prepared to be attacked. It might be here that he would be hurled back. He climbed them almost on all fours, steadying himself with his hands. It seemed to him that he had been ascending for hours, when he heard footsteps returning. A match was struck; he saw the Captain staring down at him.

"We're in time." A

The match went out.

"Catch hold of me. Tread softly."

They passed through another door. The air was growing warmer. It was evident that they were traversing a secret passage which wound within the Palace walls. At a turn they heard a muttering of voices. The Captain whispered, "Do nothing till I give the word."

They approached more cautiously to where a needle of light stabbed the darkness. Hindwood caught the fragrance of tobacco smoke. As he stooped to the spy-hole, a purring voice commenced speaking almost at his elbow, "My dear lady, you're mine—a fact which you don't seem to realize. I have only to press this button, which summons my attendants; I can snuff out your life with as little effort as I flick this ash."

He found himself peering into a room, furnished with oriental lavishness. He had a confused glimpse of beaten brass-work, shaded lamps, low tables,

cushions piled about in place of chairs. It was a blaze of color. At the far end was a gilded throne and bound to it was Santa. Her hands were tightly corded. Her ankles were lashed so that she could not stir. Her face was pale as ivory. Only her eyes seemed alive; they flashed indomitably. Pacing up and down, never shifting his gaze from hers, was the black-bearded man who had disappeared from the *Ryndam*.

She spoke defiantly. "Summon your attendants. Do you think I fear death?"

"I know you don't, dear lady. That's why I've invented a more subtle revenge. If I were an ordinary man, I should detest the very sight of you; whereas, so magnanimous am I, that your attempt to murder me has added a novel piquancy to your fascination. I have been too much loved—too spontaneously, too adoringly. You afford me a contrast. I intend to keep you caged like a lioness. The hatred in your eyes will spur my affection. Always, even when I caress you, I shall have to be on my guard. Our courtship will be a perpetual adventure. The goal of desire will be forever out of grasp, yet forever within handstretch."

He stroked his black beard thoughtfully. "With you I shall never know satiety. This continual hopping will keep me young. You, my dear, will be my secret source of romance. Every day I shall take you down, as one takes down a volume, and turn your latest pages which I alone may scan."

She strained at her bonds. "It will be no romance."

He smiled with terrifying quietness.

"Your value to me," he continued in his purring voice, "is that you've cost me so much. Ugh! Every time I look at you I remember how it felt when I sank and sank. When I rose above the waves, I saw your lights, streaking like a golden snake into the blackness. I struck out after you hopelessly. I shouted. Then I found myself alone, with no one to take pity on me and not one chance in a million of being rescued. The millionth chance arrived." He stooped at her feet, kissing her tortured hands. "And here we are met, under these auspicious circumstances, carrying on this pleasant conversation. What were you doing while I was drowning? Making love beneath the stars to your infatuated American—leaning on his arm, perhaps, warmly wrapped in your sables? And I was so cold! Did you give me a thought, I wonder?"

She stared past him like a woman frozen. "Let me know the worst."

Tapping her cheek with pretended kindness, he resumed his pacing.

"Why the worst? Is that flattering, when I've spoken of our courtship? We're well matched in wickedness, if in nothing else. You're wanted for the scaffold, whereas I should have been hung long ago if I'd received my deserts. I'd be interested to know what you'd do, if you were in my place. How much mercy would you show me? You must own

that merely to kill a person who has tried to drown you is too brief a punishment. The punishment I've planned for you is one that'll make you pray every hour for extinction. For a woman who has dispensed annihilation so lavishly I can think of nothing more just than that, when her own life has become intolerable, she should be refused the boon of death."

She spoke humbly. "There's nothing too bad that you can do to me. But I'm not the woman who tried to murder you. I'm changed. I've learnt something. I learnt it from a man."

He bowed towards her mockingly. "Your American?"

"My American, who can never be mine. I've learnt that even when we don't acknowledge Him, there's a God in the world who acts through us. It was He who saved me from the woods of Vincennes. It was He who prevented you from drowning. He had some purpose—a divine moment for which He waited. That purpose has yet to be accomplished. Who are you or I——?"

"I can tell you who you are," he snapped: "a dancing-woman, with a price upon your head. As for myself," his pale face flooded with a strangely Satanic beauty, "it would puzzle the wisest man to say who I am. To-night I am Prince Rogovich; to-morrow I may be Emperor. My puppets are mustering. By dawn they'll be marching. They're hungry; victory to them means bread."

"But if one were to feed them——?"



THE VANISHING POINT 325

“Your American again!” He gazed down on her, showing his white teeth and laughing. “What faith you have in the man! If your American is God’s unaccomplished purpose, then God and all His angels are thwarted. The messenger I have sent to execute him will not fail; he has good reason to hate him. He’s his rival for your affections. You were the bribe I offered him. You may rest assured the Captain’s work will be done well. His turn comes next.”

Jerking back her head, he stooped lower, drinking in her despair. “Millionth chances come once, if then. Yours came at Vincennes. Cease hoping. Your American is——”

“It’s a lie.”

Hindwood felt himself flung violently back. The wall turned inwards. There was a report—then silence.

IV

The Prince had pitched forward with his head in Santa’s lap. His hands were clawing at her gown. As he struggled, he stiffened and slid back, till he lay across her feet, grinning up at her. The Captain, his revolver still smoking in his hand, threw himself to his knees, feeling for his victim’s heart. He spoke dully.

“The dream of Monarchy is ended.”

The quietness was broken by a distant clamor. Momentarily it gathered volume and drew nearer.

Throughout the Palace, which had seemed so wrapt in sleep, feet were running. From the Palace-yard rose the clatter of arms and the impatience of orders being shouted. On the door of the chamber an importunate tapping had commenced.

Hindwood looked up in the midst of freeing Santa. "They'll beat in the panels. Find out what they want."

The Captain dragged himself to the door which he did not dare to open. A rapid exchange of Hungarian followed. As Santa tottered to her feet with the last cord severed, the Captain tiptoed back.

"Escape by the passage. The shot was heard. They insist on seeing Prince Rogovich."

"To be butchered in the streets! I guess not." Hindwood shook his head. "Escape does not lie in that direction. They shall see *him*. In ten minutes. At the window. Tell them."

The Captain stood aghast, pointing down at the glazing eyes of the man he had murdered. "They can't."

"I say they can."

The answer was delivered. The tapping ceased abruptly.

"Hang on to your nerves." Hindwood crouched above the body, dragging it into a sitting posture. "We've exactly ten minutes to make it look like a man who hopes to become an emperor. The peace of the world may depend on it." He turned to the Captain. "You who were his bodyguard, how would he have dressed if his ambition had been granted?"

Too pale for speech, the Captain moved towards a chest; with trembling hands he drew forth a purple robe, ermine-lined and gold-woven with mythical beasts of heraldry. Dipping deeper, he laid beside it a scepter and an iron crown of twisted laurels.

Hindwood smiled grimly. "So the scene had been rehearsed! How do these things go? You must help me put them on him."

When the Prince had been arrayed, "Now the throne," he ordered. "It'll take the three of us to move it."

The gilded throne had been hauled from its alcove, so as to face the window. The dead man, in the tinsel of his dreams, had been seated on it. He was bound, to prevent him from lolling—bound with the cords with which he himself had secured Santa. His gold-encrusted robe was spread about him. Across his knees, with his right hand resting on it, was the scepter. On his head was the iron crown of laurels.

"The lamps! Place them at his feet. Switch on all the lights, then vanish."

The curtains were flung back. A dazzling shaft pierced the outer darkness. There was a breathless silence as of worship; a superstitious rustling; a deafening acclamation, which echoed and roared about the Palace-yard.

It continued unabated for a full five minutes. It sagged and sank. Again it mounted. Then it paused expectant. It was for all the world like a triumph at the opera, when a singer only bows and

an encore is demanded. It recommenced. This time there was a note of anger.

The dead man grinned down at the applauding mob. He gave no sign to these men, prepared to die for him. Slowly it seemed to dawn on them that he did not care—that he had never cared for their wounds and hunger; that for men of his sort they were only beasts; that it made no difference whether they were conquered or victorious; he would sit there as all the kings and emperors before him, secure and immobile, sneering at their sacrifices and coining their sufferings into profit.

They found contempt in his vacant stare; cruelty in his marble hands that clutched the scepter. Gesticulating and cursing, they hurled reproaches at him. They trampled the officers who tried to quell them. Shots were exchanged. Pandemonium was commencing.

Hindwood consulted his watch. It lacked but a few minutes till two o'clock. If he could hold the garrison in confusion, Varensky would have time to seize his chance.

He turned to the Captain behind the curtain where they watched. "What is it they want?"

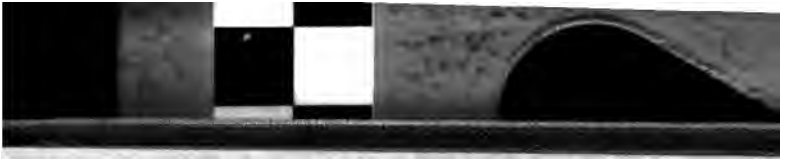
"It was some acknowledgment at first; then a speech; now it's bread. Can't you hear them, 'Bread! Bread! Or we do not march.'"

At that moment the hammering on the outer door re-started. Hindwood seized the Captain's arm. "You must speak to them; they wouldn't understand



It was like a triumph at the opera.





me. You're in uniform. There's Santa. If you don't all is lost."

"What shall I tell them?"

"Anything. Speak to them as the mouthpiece of Prince Rogovich. Say there's food in the freight-yards—two train-loads of it—and more arriving; that soon the warehouses of Budapest will be bulging."

The Captain stepped forward, an heroic figure. Just as he appeared in the oblong of the window—whether it was the sight of his uniform that provoked the storm was not certain—a volley of bullets shattered the glass. He clapped his hand to his forehead. There was a second volley. The room was plunged in darkness. Hindwood darted forward. The pounding on the outer-door grew frantic. In the Palace-yard there was the silence of horror.

Released by the knife of flying lead, the body of the Prince had doubled forward, as though to peer down at the man who had betrayed him. The Captain was beyond all help.

As Hindwood leapt back in search of Santa, the door went down with a crash. In a second the darkness was filled to overflowing—halberdiers, Palace servants, wild-eyed officials. In the confusion he caught her hand and escaped unnoticed through the pressing throng. As they hurried through salons hung with priceless treasures, looting had started. The first of the mob were ruthlessly at work. At the foot of the marble staircase he glanced at his watch. "It's exactly two o'clock," he murmured.

V

They had passed beneath the gateway where sentries should have challenged. Their posts were deserted. As they struck the road, descending beneath the ramparts, Santa questioned, "Why did you say, 'It's exactly two o'clock'?"

"Because of a note I sent Varensky." He changed the subject. "How were you captured?"

She hesitated. "It was after we'd quarreled. I was afraid I'd lost you. A messenger arrived, saying you were with the Governor and wanted me. It was a lie; the person who wanted me was Prince Rogovich."

"Then Lajos betrayed you?"

"No. He knew nothing of what happened on the *Ryndam*. He was infatuated with me and must have talked." She clutched his arm. "You're putting me off. You said so strangely, 'It's exactly two o'clock.' What was in your note to Varensky?"

For answer he halted and pointed.

Far below in the gulf of blackness, where a moment ago there had seemed to be nothing, life had begun to quicken. In the flash of multitudinous street-lamps, a city was being born. It kindled in vivid strokes, like veins of fire etched on the pavement of the night. As though an artist were completing his design, ten thousand windows opened their pin-point eyes, filling in blank spaces with rapid specks of gold. Seen from such a height, the



THE VANISHING POINT 331

effect was in miniature. The very sounds which rose up were little. At first they were no more than a sustained humming, as when a hive is about to swarm. They swelled to a melodious muttering. Then, with a rush of ecstasy, the storm of joy broke; the air pulsated with the maddening clash of chimes.

She was clinging to him. "What is it? Is it the thing for which we've hoped?"

He glanced back across his shoulder at the huge pile, towering on the rock above him. Those madmen up there, destroying and pillaging, had they time to hear it? The Palace was glowing like a furnace. As he watched, a column of flame shot tall towards the sky.

Seizing her hand, he broke into a run, making all the haste he could down the steep decline. Behind them the flames crept like serpents, licking the clouds and mounting higher. The heat was like the breath of a pursuer. Night had become vivid as day. There was no concealment. The crest of the ramparts was a gigantic torch. The Danube far below was stained red as wine. Their very shadows were lurid. And still the bells across the river pealed out their joy.

There was a galloping. Riderless horses, broken loose from the stables, thundered by. Then an automobile, driven by a man with a scared and wounded face. Others followed. The crowd on foot, fleeing from its handiwork, was not far behind. As an empty car, with an officer at the wheel, slowed down at a hairpin bend, Santa and he leapt aboard.

The danger was outdistanced. They had crossed the Danube. They were scarcely likely now to be implicated in what had happened to Prince Rogovich. But they were still at the mercy of their reckless driver. In his panic he had not once looked around; he was unaware that he carried passengers. Hindwood knew very clearly where he wanted to go; it was probably the last place to which he would be taken. The streets of Pest near the river were solitary, but somewhere the mob was gathering. It might prove awkward to be found in the company of a uniformed Monarchist who was escaping.

Having formulated his plan, he whispered it to Santa. "While I tackle him, you grasp the wheel."

Leaning forward, he flung his arm about the man's neck, jerking him backwards. The car swerved and mounted the pavement. Santa turned it into the road again. Taken by surprise, the man offered small resistance; the struggle was short. Hindwood toppled him out, climbed into the front seat and took his place.

"The station. Where is it?" he asked breathlessly.

She glanced at him with a revival of her old suspicion. "We're not leaving. Why the station?"

He could have laughed. "Still the old, distrustful Santa! Little fool—the food-trains."

The first streets which they traversed were deserted; yet lamps were lighted and the air was clamorous with belfry-music. As they drew further into the city, they shot past groups and isolated individuals, crawling in the same direction. For

the most part they were the kind of persons Santa had offered to show him that morning—people in rags or entirely stark, who hobbled from weakness or dragged themselves on all fours like dogs. It was as though the dead were rising from their graves to follow the Pied Piper of the Resurrection.

They came to a square, where soldiers had been concentrated. Their packs and rifles littered the open space; the soldiers themselves had vanished.

The traffic grew dense. It was all on foot. Hindwood turned to Santa, "We shall make better time if we leave the car."

As they mingled with the crowd, he had a nightmare sensation of unreality. He had never rubbed shoulders with so many human beings so nearly naked. They themselves seemed to regard their conditions as normal. It was he who was odd. Their legs were mere poles; their arms laths. Their heads were misshapen like deflated footballs. With panting persistence they padded forward, too frail to be anything but orderly. The air was full of an earthy fragrance. Their bodies were clammy to the touch. He could push them aside like shadows. The hair was brittle as withered moss.

It was the fashionable quarter of Budapest. Great arc-lights shone down on this flowing river of gray flesh. Behind plate-glass windows luxuries were displayed for the temptation of the bargain-snatching foreigner—feathers and furs, jewels and laces. Past them, with eyes enfevered by starvation, stole the noiseless populace. There was a woman whose

sole clothing was a rag about her neck; she continued to live in Hindwood's imagination long after the sight of her was gone. And still, with thunderous merriment, the bells above the city pealed on.

At a turn they came to the station. Further progress was blocked. Exerting his strength against the weakness of the mob, Hindwood edged his way forward. When he could go no farther, he swung round on Santa. "Tell them that I own the food-trains and that I'm going to get them bread."

She had no sooner uttered her translation than a lane was cleared. As he passed, he was aware that parched lips stooped to kiss his hands, his garments, the very ground that he trod. He shuddered. The indecent self-abasement of such necessity inflamed his indignation. Ahead a cordon was drawn across the road. It was composed of Russian refugees. He recognized them by their baggy blouses and by the short-haired women of the Battalions of Death. From the tail of a wagon an orator was speechifying. His head was peaked like a dunce's cap. Beside him stood a woman, white as a lily with hair the color of raw gold.

Hindwood caught Santa's arm. "For heaven's sake, what's he saying?"

"What he always says on such occasions. He's preaching his gospel of non-resistance and promising to die for them."

"Who cares for whom he dies, when bellies are empty and bodies are naked? Tell them I'll clothe them and give them bread."



THE VANISHING POINT 335

As she translated what he had said, a cry went up which drowned Varensky. He found himself in the open space, clambering up to the wagon and dragging Santa up beside him. There was a deep silence.

"Tell them," he commanded, "that starvation is ended. I'll feed them on one condition: that they refuse to fight. Tell them I'll drive the Russian menace back without a single shot being fired. Tell them that I promise, on my honor as an American, to feed them all. Though food-trains are exhausted to-night, more will arrive to-morrow. More and more."

He paused, blinded with emotion at sight of the forest of thin hands strained up to him. Shooting out his fist tremendously, he threatened. "And tell them that I won't feed a jack one of them, if there's another man, woman or child slaughtered, or a hint of rioting."

VI

He had kept his word; as far as Hungary was concerned, every living soul had been nourished. For seven days and nights, sleeping only at odd intervals, he had sat in the barracks of the Russian refugees with the map of Europe staring down on him from the wall. Wherever a food-train had been despatched, the place had been marked by a little red flag. He had had a wireless-apparatus installed; from that bare room, heavy with mildew, he had sent out his S. O. S. calls to humanity. He had begged,

threatened, argued, commanded until at last he knew that he had won his cause. What he did not know was that his own example had proved more convincing than many words. The simple drama of his personal conversion—that he should be giving what he had come to sell—had stirred men's consciences. It had given him the right to talk. Where once troops would have been hurried, food was being pushed forward. It was an experiment alarmingly novel; but his phrase caught on, "The Barricade of Bread." It had been flashed across five continents. Wherever the printed word had power, it had kindled men's imaginations. By a world war-wrecked, confronted by yet another war, it had been hailed as the strategy that would end all wars.

Loaf by loaf, sack by sack the barricade was rising. Those little red flags, pinned on the map, marked its progress. It was deepening and spreading in a flanking movement, just as formerly army corps had massed for offensives. Soon the barricade would be complete; it would stretch in an unbroken line from the Dardanelles to the Baltic. There would be fighting, probably to the east of Poland, where the Monarchists were marching in a forlorn attempt to defeat the famished hordes. That could not be prevented. But by the time the outcasts struck his main defense, he would be in a position to halt them.

It was only now, when the situation was in hand, that he had leisure to realize what he had been doing. He was filled with depression in his hour of triumph. It was long past midnight. He felt gray



THE VANISHING POINT 337

and spent. The barracks were as quiet as a morgue. He wondered why; they had been so crowded with derelicts of valiant armies, men and girls, who, having failed to save Russia with the rifle, had been preparing to rescue her with knowledge. Then he recalled. He had sent them all away. They had been the new kind of soldier, by whose sacrifice his ideal had conquered. He saw again their uplifted faces, as he had summoned them one by one and ordered them on their perilous journeys. Wherever a red flag was pinned on the map, one of those derelicts was in command. The "Little Grandmother," she had been the last. Beside himself and his wireless operators, there could be no one left except Varensky, Santa and Anna.

He glanced at the window. It was a square of jet. During the early days and nights it had framed a heart of fire, where the Palace had smouldered on the heights of Buda. Like a subsided volcano, the Palace had burned itself out. It was as though the fury of his life were ended. He bowed his head in his arms, striving to reconjure what had happened.

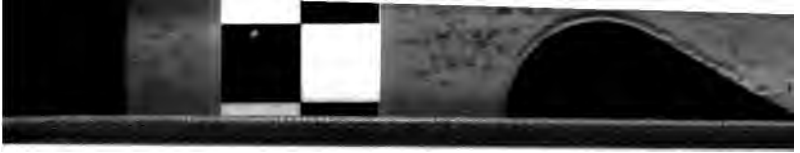
Flitting about the room, with his strangely cat-like tread, Varensky had been forever entering and exiting. He had been his second self, silent and agile, anticipating his plans without a word spoken. It was Varensky who had marshaled his exiled compatriots and placed their services at his disposal. It was Varensky who had warned him of the strategic points where the barricade must be strengthened. It had been always Varensky to whom he had

turned for advice and courage when things were darkest. Without Varensky he could have accomplished nothing. And yet it was Varensky whom he had dethroned. This should have been his moment. He had shouted him down, snatched control from him and earned the credit. The self-effacement of one whom he had despised as an egoist made him humble. In a rush of tenderness he discovered that he loved him. The peaked head was forgotten, and the face scared white as if it had seen a ghost. The timidity of his appearance no longer counted; the thing that mattered was the spirit, resolute and shining as a sword, that hid within the scabbard of the grotesque body.

And now that he remembered, there had been grief in his green eyes—the grief of a man who had been cheated. Once again Varensky had drawn him near to Calvary; the chance to die had been stolen from him.

And Anna—he could not guess how she felt or what she thought. In all those seven days and nights it seemed as though she had never looked at him. She had moved about him like a nun, ministering to his wants with her gaze averted. Vaguely he was aware that to him she was not what she appeared to others. The old legend had been revived; again, as in St. Petersburg after the fall of Czardom, wherever she passed people knelt. To him she was no saint; his desire was too human.

Watching the three of them with sphinxlike wisdom, there had been Santa, her womanhood clamor-



THE VANISHING POINT 339

ous and ignored. What had she made of it? Had she found material for humor in their temporary heroism?

And so he came back to his first question—what had he been doing? In constructing the barricade of bread, he had been preventing Varensky from dying; in preventing Varensky from dying, he had been raising a barricade between himself and Anna. Having bankrupted his pocket, he had bankrupted his heart. In spite of warnings, he had gone in search of the vanishing point, where the parallel rails of possibility and desire seem to join—the point at which, to quote Varensky's words, "The safety of the journey ends." It was the goal of every man who wrecks himself in the hope that he may save a world.

How long had he been sitting there brooding? He was cold. The square of window had turned from jet to gray. Furtively he glanced behind him. Anna was gazing down on him.

VII

She was dressed for a journey, muffled in furs. Her left hand was gloved; her right extended. His heart turned coward. Surely he had earned his reward. He commenced to rise, pushing back his chair. The steady blueness of her eyes held him.

"Good-by," she said. "I should have left without

saying good-by, if I had not known I could trust you.”

“But you can trust me. It’s because you can trust me that you must stay.”

“I can’t stay.”

“Why not?”

“We made a bargain. Do you remember? That until we were free, we would play the game by him—that we would even guard him against himself. You told me once, ‘I wouldn’t be friends with a woman who couldn’t be loyal.’ I’m trying to be loyal.” She caught her breath. “He’s gone.”

“Varensky?”

She nodded.

“Where?”

“To die for us.”

In the silence that followed, the heat of his temptation vanished. He felt accused by the quixotic magnanimity of this strange creature, half prophet, half charlatan, whose wife he had coveted.

“Once I’d have been glad that he should die,” he confessed slowly, “but not now. Food has done far more than his sacrifice could have accomplished. Why should he be determined to die now?”

She trusted herself to come closer, standing over him and giving him her hand.

“Perhaps for our sakes. Perhaps for his own. Perhaps in the hope that his appearance may put a stop to what’s left of the fighting. There was a wireless last night which he kept to himself. It said that skirmishing was developing between the Poles

and the Russian refugees in the No Man's Land beyond Kovel. It was after he had read it that he went out. I waited for him to return—when I guessed. We've all misjudged him. Perhaps we're still misjudging him. Who can say why he's gone? There's nothing gained by attributing motives. He wants to give his life. He's promised he would so often; always he's been thwarted. He owes it to his honor. Kovel may be the world's last battle—his final chance."

In the bare room the dawn was spreading. Hindwood rose from his chair, stretching his cramped body and gazing at the map with its safe red line of flags.

"Our work is ended," he said quietly. "Within the next few hours stronger men will be here to take control—a commission of the best brains, picked from all the nations. God chose us to be His stop-gap." He paused. "After having been His instruments in averting a world-catastrophe to speak of things personal seems paltry. And yet my love for you fills all my thoughts. I leave Budapest a bankrupt. I shall have to start life afresh. Your love is literally my sole possession and I have no right to it."

She was backing towards the door, retreating from him. He stepped over to the window, widening the distance that separated them.

"Do you feel more secure now? You needn't fear me," he reproached her. "Was it because I spoke of our love? We have no reason to be ashamed of

it. We've played fair. How could we do less when Varensky has played so fair by us? It's for our sakes he's gone, that he may free us." Then, "You're setting out alone on a journey. Would you mind telling me its object?"

"You know. To prevent him. To catch up with him. To bring him back."

"And if he refuses?"

"To die with him."

He smiled whimsically. "The vanishing point! For you, with your high standard of honor, if you were to overtake it, your problem would be solved. But suppose the vanishing point eludes you. Suppose your husband agrees to live, have you thought of that? It means that you and I will never——"

With an imploring gesture she cut him short. "It means that you and I will never learn to despise each other. It means that I shall always remember you at your greatest, as I've seen you in the last seven days, self-sacrificing, brave and noble—so self-forgetting that you could even forget the woman you adored."

He sank his head. In the gray square of window he looked old and haggard. "It's true, and yet it's incredible: if we were to allow him to die, we should despise each other. In the long years——" He glanced up. "Though you were willing to let him and I won you, do you think I would want you? Not that way. I'd want you so little that I'm coming with you to help you to prevent him."



VIII

Long lines of neglected tillage! Deserted farms! Broken fences! A gray expanse of sky! Knots of peasants trekking always westward! Panting cattle, nearing the exhaustion point! Creaking carts! Dawn growing whiter; day growing golden; sunlight fading; night becoming flecked with stars! Always the rhythm of the engine, the plunging into the distance, the impatient urgency to thrust forward!

It had been useless to think of traveling by trains; the railways were too congested. Moreover, they had strongly suspected that he had set out by car. If the No Man's Land beyond Kovel were his destination, then Cracow would lie midway on his journey. Cracow was one of the strong-points in the barricade, where a clump of red flags was flying. All the traffic was escaping from the danger. If he had chosen that route, there would be definite news of him. Any one traveling towards the danger could not help but be remarked.

As they inquired of fugitives, they discovered that two cars were ahead of them. The first contained a madman, with eyes green as emeralds and a face white and set as a mask; the second, a dark-haired woman, beautiful as a fallen angel. The woman seemed to be in pursuit of the man. They were, perhaps, thirty miles apart. They had thundered by

into the imperiled future as though the self-same devil rode behind them.

What could be Santa's purpose? Anna and he argued the point, sometimes aloud, more often in their unuttered thoughts. All their old doubts concerning her rose up rampant. Was she a Bolshevist agent, hurrying back to sell the last of her secrets? Was her purpose to save or to betray Varensky?

What had she ever wanted from him? Had she found a quality in his self-destructing idealism that had called forth her pitying worship? In her own dark way had she enshrined him in a mysterious corner of her heart? Had she recognized in him a childlike weakness that had compelled her protection? Had he stood in the twilight of her life for a door that might open into ultimate redemption?

Or was it loneliness that had made her follow him—the sure knowledge that everything was ended? In those seven days, whilst they had made history together, had she seen something that had tortured her? That she was not wanted, as he was not wanted? Was it despair that had beckoned her into the chaos through which he hurried to destruction?

When they reached Cracow it was to find the city deserted. The streets by which they entered were deathly silent; the doors wide open; the pavements strewn with furniture which owners had lacked time to rescue. Here and there were carts which had collapsed, and thin horses which had died in harness. Even cats and dogs had departed. Terror peered



THE VANISHING POINT 345

from behind the blankness of windows. It was like a city pillaged.

Whatever optimisms they had entertained, they knew for certain now that war had started. Out of sight, across gray wastes to the eastward, gray ranks of skeletons, armed with nothing but disease, were approaching. The dread they inspired was so great that outcasts, only a shade less starving, had stampeded before them.

At a turn they came to the railroad. Here their eyes met a different spectacle. From a freight-train on a siding men, white to the eyes with dust, were rolling barrels. They were volunteers recruited from the safer nations—the first of the new kind of army. They were piling flour where once they would have been stacking shells. Hindwood recognized the barrels' markings. His sense of tragedy lightened. Laughing down into his companion's eyes, he shouted, "Mine! Look, Anna. Mine that I meant to sell!"

A short-haired girl, in the tattered uniform of the Battalion of Death, was in charge. Coming up to the car, she saluted smartly. Yes, she had seen Varensky. It was three hours since he had passed. He had filled up with water and gasolene, gasolene having arrived on the supply-train. He had left for Brest-Litovsk, stating that his object was to gain a respite for the barricade-builders. He proposed to put himself at the head of the famine-march and to check the rapidity of its advance. After his de-

parture, the other had panted up—the dark-haired woman—only an hour behind him.

Wasting no time in conversation, Hindwood imitated Varensky's example. He was dazed for want of sleep—almost nodding. But the man he had to save was ahead of him. Having filled his tanks and made sure of his engine, he started forward.

They were throbbing through empty streets again, when a strange sound thrilled the silence—a trumpet-call, which rang out sharply across the housetops and broke off suddenly.

Had they come? He slowed down, prepared to wheel about.

Seeing what was in his thoughts, Anna rested her hand on his arm reassuringly.

"It's from the tower of St. Mary's. How often I've heard it! Ah, there it is again!" Gazing up and bending forward, she listened. Then she spoke, as though addressing some one who walked above the city, "Brave fellow! Though they've all deserted, you've stayed on."

"To whom are you talking?"

She explained quickly. Centuries ago the Church of St. Mary's had been an outpost of Christendom, used as a watch-tower against the invading Tartar; a soldier had been kept continually stationed there to give warning on a trumpet of the first approach of danger. In the fourteenth century, whilst arousing the city, the trumpeter had been struck in the throat by an arrow. His call had faltered, rallied and sunk. With his dying breath he had sounded



THE VANISHING POINT 347

a final blast, which had broken off short. The broken call had saved Cracow. Ever since, to commemorate his faithfulness, there had never been an hour, day or night, when his broken trumpet-call, ending abruptly in an abyss of silence, had not been sounded from the tower.

Hindwood leant across the wheel, staring dreamily before him. "It might have been his voice—Varensky's. He's like that—a dying trumpeter, sounding a last warning. I almost believe in him. It's too late——"

"It may not be," she whispered.

Night was falling. Straining his eyes to keep awake, he drove impetuously on, forcing a path through the opposing shadows.

IX

How they had arrived it would have puzzled him to tell. He had vague memories of sunsets and dawns; of times when sleep had drugged him; of unrefreshed awakenings.

They had reached Brest-Litovsk, the city fatal to the Russians, which the Czar had always superstitiously avoided. Like Cracow, it was deserted. Unlike Cracow, it was a pile of ruins. Seven times in seven years it had been bombarded and captured. Beneath an iron sky, it listened for the tramp of the latest conqueror.

Hindwood drew forth his map. It was over a hun-

dred versts to Kovel; he doubted whether his gasoline would take him. There was nowhere where he could replenish his supply. Before him lay a No Man's Land from which everything had perished—behind a silence from which everything had escaped. To continue his pursuit was folly. There was no promise of success to allure him; of Varensky and Santa he had lost all trace. He glanced at his drowsing companion; he had pledged his word to her. Reluctantly he climbed into his seat and started forward.

The suicidal stupidity of war—that was the thought that absorbed him. Every sight that his eyes encountered emphasized its madness. Yet beyond the horizon, where distance seemed to terminate, men were killing one another. He understood at last Varensky's passion to die. When all else had failed, to offer one's body was the only protest.

The landscape was growing featureless. Rivers had overflowed. The labor of centuries was sinking beneath morass. Villages and post-houses had been destroyed; woods torn by shell-fire. Stationed along the route, like buoys guarding a channel, black and white verst-poles gleamed monotonously. On either side stretched a never-ending graveyard, marked by rough crosses or inverted rifles. Down this pitiless straight road had marched the seven invasions—Russian, German, Polish, Bolshevist, each with a dream of glory in its eyes. With the victory lost and the dream forgotten, they mold-ered companionably.



THE VANISHING POINT 349

It was half-way to Kovel that he first noticed what was happening; behind scrub and fallen trees it had probably been happening for some time. It was a gray wolf, grown bold, which first drew his attention. Like a dog, seeking its master, it came trotting down the road. After that they came in packs—not only wolves, but every other kind of untamed animal. It was as though they were fleeing before a drive—the tremendous drive of a famished nation. In their dread they seemed to have postponed their right to prey. Hunter and quarry journeyed side by side, their enmities in abeyance in their common terror of the enmity which stalked behind.

Hindwood had grown used to the spectacle, when suddenly he was startled by another sight—a child. A child so matted and neglected, that he scarcely recognized him as human. His feet were swathed in balls of rags. He limped painfully, walking among the animals and staring straight before him. At shortening intervals others followed, till at last they came in crowds.

Beyond Kovel, where commences the crumbling trench-system in which the vanished Russo-German armies remained locked for so many years, he came across his first trace of Varensky—an abandoned car with a broken axle. Varensky must be on foot, not far ahead. He had passed another mile when his own car halted; the gasolene had given out. With the ceasing of the engine he caught another sound—the popping of rifle-fire. It dawned on him

that the trenches of the dead battlefield were again inhabited. He had been driving straight into the heart of the fighting.

The firing was drawing nearer. The Monarchists were falling back. A bullet whizzed over his head and pinged into a mass of rusted wire.

All that followed happened in a flash. He had seized Anna and rushed with her to cover. From where he watched, he could see soldiers retreating, and the tops of steel helmets bobbing above the trenches. Of the advancing host he could see nothing.

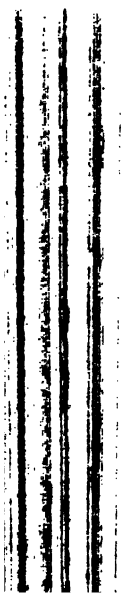
Suddenly from behind a mound, a man with a peaked head sprang up. He was dressed as a civilian. He commenced to run up the road towards the enemy, waving something white. Immediately, from another place of hiding, a woman leapt up and followed. It was as though on the instant truce had been declared; a tranquillity of amazement settled down.

As he reached what appeared to be No Man's Land, he drew himself erect, with expanded chest, and commenced to sweep his arms in the gestures of oratory. It was dumb show; it was impossible to hear what was being said. While he was speaking, the woman caught up with him and flung herself upon him, making a shield of her body.

Curiosity satisfied, both sides fired. The man and woman crumpled. Fighting recommenced.

THE END

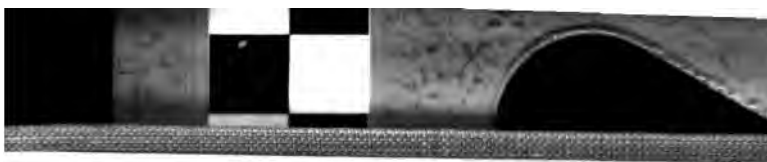






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